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***Bernard Suits' Utopia of Gameplay:
A Critical Analysis***

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A Dissertation in
The Department of Philosophy

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Abstract

In this dissertation, I integrate the published and newly available unpublished works of Bernard Suits to arrive at an original, holistic interpretation of his corpus. I identify, analyze, and resolve inconsistencies in his position which have not been previously critiqued in depth. Centrally, I provide a critical analysis of Suits' relatively obscure *utopian thesis*: his argument that the '*ideal of existence*' for humankind is a utopia of gameplay.

More specifically, I demonstrate that Suits' utopian thesis fails on its own grounds because his *utopian vision*—the thought experiment upon which his utopian thesis rests for its plausibility—requires that humanity enter a post-instrumental phase of culture unimaginable from our current species-perspective. The nature of utopian gameplay is obscured behind this cultural gap, and thus we pre-utopians have no rational reason to accept Suits' assertion that it instantiates the ideal of existence. Finally, I sympathetically rehabilitate Suits' utopian thesis along perfectionist lines as the *utopian game design thesis*, and show that its main value lies in its role as a regulative ideal, offering a unique set of normative recommendations for our current gaming practices.

Acknowledgements

I am deeply indebted to Jon Pike and Alex Barber, my PhD supervisors at the Open University, for their written and verbal commentary on all previous drafts of this dissertation. They have been boundlessly generous with their time, their enthusiasm for the project, and their various criticisms of it. Where possible I have attempted to isolate their distinct contributions in the main text, but their influence on the work is too deep and ingrained to call out each instance of improvement that they have contributed.

For more localized assistance, I would like to thank Duncan MacIntosh for inspiring the direction of Chapter 2, and Tony Milligan for weighing in with commentary on an early version of Chapter 3. Eleni Panagiotarakou invited me to present Chapter 4 to her Philosophy of Leisure class at Concordia University in November 2016, which forced me to significantly refine my arguments therein. Most crucially—from a causal perspective—Robert Cowan was the first to suggest that I channel my academic efforts toward the philosophy of games, and acted as a faithful steward of both my philosophy and game libraries between my degree studies.

The raw material of Chapter 5 was presented at the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport, who honoured this piece with their R.

Scott Kretchmar Student Essay Award at their September 2016 meeting in Olympia, Greece. It was later presented at the Philosophy of Games Workshop at the University of Utah in October 2016, where it was refined by the verbal feedback of William Morgan, Thi Nguyen, and Brock Rough. Finally it was published as “Endless Summer: What Kinds of Games Will Suits’ Utopians Play?” in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* (Yorke 2017). Multiple anonymous referees gave their formative feedback on earlier drafts of this chapter, and thanks must go to them as well.

A version of Chapter 6 won the R. Scott Kretchmar Student Essay Award at the subsequent September 2017 annual meeting of the International Association for the Philosophy of Sport in Whistler, British Columbia. It would not be an understatement to say that the support and camaraderie of the IAPS community has been a great spur to action, and an essential ingredient to the success of this research project. Thanks go as well to the fellows of the Analytical Philosophy of Sport Reading Group, including Jon Pike, Yuval Eylon, and John William Devine, who each gave this chapter a thorough working over at their November 2017 meeting. Thi Nguyen gave a helpful in-depth critique of a later draft of the work before it was presented at the June 2018 meeting of the Canadian Philosophical Association at the University of Quebec in Montreal, where Gwen Bradford offered her formal commentary on it.

Chapter 7 benefitted from the insightful commentary of Paul Gaffney, Thi Nguyen, and several anonymous reviewers before it was published as “Bernard Suits on Capacities: Games, Perfectionism, and Utopia” in the *Journal of the Philosophy of Sport* (Yorke 2018). As I have workshopped this and other parts of the dissertation less formally at the Utopian Studies Society annual conference, the Thomas More Institute, and multiple OU Postgraduate Philosophy Conferences, it is likely that I have forgotten significant individual contributions gleaned at those meetings. Apologies in advance to any who have been thus slighted.

Finally, sincere gratitude goes to my wife, Joanie Rivard, for her patience and support during the planning and execution of this project, and to our daughter, Leonie Elle Yorke, who made life feel both deeper and lighter, as needed.

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Note on the Unpublished Works of Bernard Suits

Throughout this dissertation, I reference the unpublished works of Bernard Suits (1925-2007). Suits taught for most of his professional life (from 1966 to 1994) at the University of Waterloo's Department of Philosophy. In 2013 his widow, Cheryl Ballantine, donated many of his previously unseen typeset and manuscript writings to that university, with the intention that they become available for public inspection.

All unpublished materials that I reference are contained in the Bernard Suits fonds (GA 251), currently held by the University of Waterloo Library's Special Collections and Archives. There are 7 boxes, holding 105 files of material, which have been publicly accessible since 2014. To my knowledge, no published scholarly use has been made of the Suits fonds previously to this thesis. It is thus one of my chief aims to progress Suits scholarship by addressing this lacuna.

The fonds materials are roughly organized according to theme, although this system is not altogether reliable. For example, different pages of a single document might be found spread between two or more files, each of which is tagged under a separate heading, with mismatching dates assigned to these headings. The dates given by the fonds catalogue are often not specific and, in some cases, are obviously inaccurate. Thus, I have given no specific dates to my bibliographic entries that are sourced from these materials, but have instead opted to leave the years as blanks, followed by letters that indicate the order in

which I believe the pieces were written (e.g., '19—a'), given contextual clues I gleaned from other fonds materials (such as ages and types of paper, fonts of particular typewriters or printers used for specific periods by the author, etc.).

Unless otherwise specified, I reference only work that was typeset or bound for the purposes of eventual presentation, publication, or peer review, and can therefore be reasonably understood as a reliable indicator of Suits' philosophical commitments. These often represent clarifications or refinements on positions identifiable in his published works, although there are also freestanding original contributions to his oeuvre. Of particular importance in this regard are *Grasshopper Soup: Philosophic Essays on Games* (Suits 19--b) and *Return of the Grasshopper: Games and the End of the Future* (Suits 19--c), as each constitute two novel typeset and bound versions of Suits' intended sequel to his only published book, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* (Suits 2014 [1978]).

Many thanks go to Cheryl Ballantine who, as copyright holder of the fonds, granted me special permission to digitally replicate their contents for the purposes of my research over the course of two week-long library visits in 2016 and 2017. She was also generous in answering many biographical questions I had about Suits, thereby creating a better context for understanding the relevance of the fonds materials. Her assistance and goodwill greatly facilitated this research.

Introduction: Bernard Suits, in Three Pieces

In this introduction, I give an exegesis and analysis of Bernard Suits' corpus of work on the philosophy of games, both published and unpublished, and discuss to what extent we might be permitted to interpret it as a cohesive and coherent system of thought. I organize Suits' corpus chronologically into three divided 'pieces' of interrelated academic output, but discuss individual works thematically within those sections as appropriate. In the course of this comprehensive introduction to Suits, the main conceptual pillars and fault lines of his philosophical oeuvre will become apparent. To begin, however, I must introduce some of the few theorists who were writing on games as a subject of scholarly interest before Suits, for they are worth mentioning in terms of their influence on his work.

Johan Huizinga's ground-breaking *Homo Ludens* (Huizinga 1955 [1938])¹ focuses on the history and prehistory of gaming, and its anthropological and sociological bases and functions. Huizinga sees play and, correspondingly, games literally everywhere: coded into ritualistic performances, the trading of goods, the production of art, and armed confrontations. Games, he says, can be playful or serious, purposeless or purposeful. While fascinating in its interpretation of

¹ Huizinga's book is edited by Karl Mannheim, whose *Ideology and Utopia* (Mannheim 1950) remains a milestone of utopian theory.

culture, the philosophical problem with Huizinga's approach soon makes itself apparent: for if everything is a game, then nothing is a non-game, and thus the concept 'game' becomes vacuous—it cannot be meaningful if there is no non-play kind of human activity to compare it to; for example, 'work'. Suits sees and corrects this deficiency in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia* with the following distinction: "working is doing things you have to do and playing is doing things for the fun of it" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 17). He also borrows Huizinga's use of 'Ludens' from the Latin *ludus*, meaning play in general (Huizinga 1955 [1938], p. 35), and adapts it to create the adjective 'lusory', meaning roughly 'of, or pertaining to, a game', for his own purposes (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 37).

In mainstream philosophy, it was Ludwig Wittgenstein who first mirrored the social scientific community's interest in the phenomenon of gameplay; but it is precisely due to the richness and diversity of the field that Wittgenstein despaired of the quest for an adequate philosophical definition of it. Indeed, Wittgenstein uses 'game' as a paradigm case for his family resemblance thesis—that most, if not all, concepts do not admit of analysis in terms of necessary and sufficient conditions (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §§ 66-71). As well as generating a cottage industry of philosophical journal articles on this topic, Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* directly inspired Suits to write *The Grasshopper* as a defence of moderate definitionalism in philosophical analysis, specifically as it pertains to 'gameplay' (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 1-2).

Roger Callois, in *Man, Play, and Games*, produced an influential typology of games, including *agon* (competitive games of skill), *alea* (games of chance), *mimesis* (games of make-believe), and *ilinx* (games of sensation and emotion); as well as identifying a distinction between *paidia* (unstructured playfulness) and *ludus* (rule-bound games) (Callois 1961). However, Callois focuses more on *play* than *games* per se; he defines ‘play’ as being voluntary, unproductive, rule-governed, imaginary, having an uncertain outcome, and separate—in the same sense as Huizinga’s ‘magic circle’ (Huizinga 1955 [1938], pp. 11, 57)—from mundane activities. Suits incorporates several of the elements of Callois’ definition of ‘play’ in his later definition of ‘game’, and implicitly employs Callois’ distinction between *paidia* and *ludus* when delineating his concepts of ‘open’ games’ and ‘closed games’ (Suits 2014 [1978], Chapter 12).

Eric Berne, in his *Games People Play*, also believes that games are omnipresent, but he focuses instead upon the psychological motivations for their perpetuation: initiating and cooperating in social ‘transactions’ (Berne 1964). The reason, he says, for engaging in these transactions—which admit of game-theoretical analysis—is to maximize the amount of ‘strokes’, i.e., the successful elicitation of desired reactions in others, that one can accomplish. Strokes validate and reinforce the self-image of the ‘player’, forming and cementing behavioural patterns. Even when transactions become disagreeable and are obviously manipulative, Berne holds that the players will keep iterating them

because they are the only games possible to play *as themselves*; i.e., to surrender one's patterns of interaction with others often means surrendering one's own identity, which is a patently undesirable outcome for rational agents attempting to maximize on their values and interests. For Berne, players are the sums of the games that they play. The intellectual debt that Suits owes Berne is largely a negative one, for Suits vehemently rejects Berne's picture of games as being involuntary played for neurotic motivations. He writes that "Berne's people play 'games' in order to secure their psychological survival... Berne's players (Berne is saying) would have no reason to play 'games' if they achieved a condition of psychological autonomy" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 165). A game that *must* be played, for any reason, cannot constitute an instantiation of gameplay for Suits.

With the appropriate context thus set, it is time to put on Suits himself. For although his only published book, *The Grasshopper*, has received a good deal of recent philosophical attention, many of his lesser-known articles and unpublished works have languished in obscurity. In the following sections, I will show demonstrate how the incorporation of these ancillary works can further enrich our understanding of Suits' schema.

First Piece: Suits' Early Questions (1955-1970)

Bernard Suits launched his early academic career with a string of book reviews (Suits 1955, 1960, 1961b, 1962, 1964), an article on the metaphysics of John Dewey and Gerorge Santayana (Suits 1961a), and a piece responding to a literary criticism of Herman Melville's *Billy Budd* (Suits 1963). Then, in April and June of 1967, Suits published his first two major articles on the philosophy of games—first “Is Life a Game We Are Playing?” in *Ethics* (Suits 1967a), followed shortly by “What Is a Game?” in *Philosophy of Science* (Suits 1967b)—both of which had very different, but related, questions they attempted to answer. Suits would spend the rest of his life trying to answer these, and became famous for uniting them in *The Grasshopper*.

“What Is a Game?” lays the foundation for much of Suits' subsequent work. It contains what I call the ‘definitionist thesis’—the contention that the concept ‘game’ admits of concise philosophical definition, contra Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous assertion to the contrary in *Philosophical Investigations*—and provides an early version of his definition of gameplay, which would bring popular attention to his work with the publication of *The Grasshopper* a little over a decade later: “to play a game is to engage in an activity directed towards bringing about a specific state of affairs, using only means permitted by specific rules, where the means permitted by the rules are more limited in scope than they would be in the absence of the rules, and where the sole reason for

accepting such limitation is to make possible such activity” (Suits 1967b, p. 156).

The slightly cleaner, more precise version of this definition emerged with labels for each of these nested clauses:²

To play a game is to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43).

This latter definition has become universally accepted as authoritative, and is the one I will refer to throughout this dissertation.

The article also outlines what William Morgan later dubbed the ‘logical incompatibility thesis’ (Morgan 1987), Suits’ idea that cheaters cannot by definition be playing a game if and when they break that game’s rules. For, as Suits writes, “if the rules are broken the original end becomes impossible of attainment, since one cannot (really) win the game unless he plays it, and one cannot (really) play the game unless he obeys the rules of the game” (Suits 1967b, p. 150). The apparent implausibility of the incompatibility thesis, in light of apparent contradictions such as those generated by intentional fouls in various sports, has become one of the main arguments against *formalism*, the position

² Thomas Hurka was the first to formally recognize the ‘nestedness’, or network of logical dependencies, within Suits’ definition: “Its third element, the lusory attitude, is defined in terms of its second, the constitutive rules, since it involves an attitude to those rules, namely one of accepting them. And its second element is defined in terms of its first, since the rules restrict how you may pursue the prelusory goal. The elements of the analysis are therefore nested, the first inside the second and the second inside the third, and the resulting unity is part of its philosophical power” (Hurka 2014, p. xiii).

Fred D'Agostino identifies as the claim that "game-derivative notions are defined solely in terms of the formal rules of a game" (D'Agostino 1981, p. 7).

Nevertheless, Suits adequately addresses this critique when he directly states, regarding "rules whose violations results in a fixed penalty" such as those regarding intentional fouls, that: "these rules and the lusory consequences of their violation are established by their constitutive rules and are simply extensions of them" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 40). If a foul is penalized by a formal game rule, then fouling is formally part of that game.

"Is Life a Game We Are Playing?" is a much more speculative and enigmatic piece, which has received far less academic attention. Here, Suits aims to convince his readers that "life *may* be a game" (Suits 1967a, p. 209, emphasis mine), and that if it is, "a philosophy based on that discovery might provide for mankind consolation equal to that provided by an Epicurus or an Epictetus; or more sanguinely, it might accomplish a renaissance of man's reflection upon himself comparable to that accomplished by a Socrates or a Freud" (Suits 1967a, p. 213).³ The appeal of this more grandiose claim—which we might properly regard as the embryonic presentation of what Doug McLaughlin calls Suits' 'utopian thesis' (McLaughlin 2008); the idea that a life consisting entirely of

³ Suits articulated such a philosophy, in the form of a slogan, in that same article: "Life is a game. Live accordingly." (Suits 1967a, p. 213)

gameplay is the “*ideal of existence*” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182)—is only now beginning to be discussed widely by writers of secondary literature on Suits.

Nevertheless, the article is a repository of themes and concepts that Suits will spend the rest of his academic career attempting to advance. There is a foreshadowing of the ‘capacity thesis’, later given in “The Elements of Sport”, in the following form: “people play games so that they can realize in themselves capacities not realizable (or not readily so) in the pursuit of their ordinary activities” (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12). Suits’ early version is distinct enough to warrant its own title, the ‘revelation thesis’, given thus: “the discovery that life is a game might disclose unimagined sources of human action and stimulate unexpected feats of human invention” (Suits 1967a, p. 213). In the capacity thesis, *people play games in order to develop their latent capacities*; in the revelation thesis, *people develop their latent capacities due to the realization that they are already playing a game*, and as a result of this emancipating discovery, human culture may begin to radically transform—possibly, into a utopia of gameplay.

A thread left dangling here is picked up in Suits’ 1970 article, also phrased in the form of a question: “Can You Play a Game Without Knowing It?” As Suits recognizes that “if life is a game we are playing, it must be a game which most of us, at any rate, do not know we are playing” (Suits 1967a, p. 209), the plausibility of his thesis that “life may be a game” directly depends upon the possibility of

our being able to play a game unconsciously. In his early defence of this idea, he wrote that “a person could fail to know he was playing a game... if he were doing all of these things [i.e., the four necessary conditions of his definition of gameplay] but did not know that he was doing one or more of them. (In the same way, a person might not know that X was a bachelor because he did not know that X was an adult, or unmarried, or a male.)” (Suits 1967a, p. 210, square brackets mine) Ignorance of fulfilling the conditions of Suits’ definition of gameplay does not exempt one’s actions from fitting that definition.

When Suits returns for a more extended defence of this position, he embroiders it with a thought experiment involving a character called J.B. Lovegold, a businessman who—upon due reflection—realizes that he has been voluntarily, albeit unconsciously, keeping his weaker competitor, N. Croach, in business just so he can enjoy competing against him. The Lovegold character discovers that

I evidently prefer to have the fun of making as much money as I can with competition, even though this reduces my profits, rather than to make money exclusively as a means for serving my other interests... Well, well, to think that I have been playing a game for over a year without knowing it. Live and learn. (Suits 1970, pp. 132-133)

This hypothetical example is plausible enough, and is strengthened with the further possibilities that ‘imbeciles’, the logically ignorant, and those suffering from ‘logical aphasia’ due to psychological interference (such as Oedipus’ initial

refusal to recognize the full extent of his tragic condition in Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*) could also be unconscious game players (Suits 1970, pp. 136-137).

Suits holds that logical aphasia may be the reason that *most* of us do not ordinarily entertain the possibility that life is a game, because

We believe that life is serious, or hard, or capable of nobility, or demanding of sacrifice. We believe it is significant. But we believe there is something essentially trifling and insignificant about games (Suits 1967a, p. 210).

Thus stated, the idea that life is a game entails that life is *both* significant *and* not significant—a logical contradiction. There are two methods, however, for resolving this apparent contradiction: to accept that (1) *life is insignificant*, or (2) *games are significant*. If (1) is true, then it is entirely appropriate and logical to (a) make an *insignificant game* out of an *insignificant life*; or to (b) make a *significant game* out of an *insignificant life*. If (2) is true, then to (c) make a *significant game* out of a *significant life* is a logically defensible strategy, in a way that making an *insignificant game* out of a *significant life* is not. Suits touches on this when he writes that “the discovery that one is playing a game would be likely to result in either chagrin or delight, depending on the player’s attitude toward games and toward the proper conduct of his life. The first response would probably be to stop playing, the second to play better” (Suits 1970, p. 138). This choice—between suicide (ceasing play), and a utopia of gameplay (playing better)—is reformulated in the ‘utopian suicide thesis’ in the final chapter of *The*

Grasshopper (Suits 2014 [1978], Chapter 15), and in “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections” (Suits 1984b, p. 8). This conclusion is also explicitly spelled out in “Is Life a Game We Are Playing?”, wherein Suits writes: “A man who discovered that to live is to play a game might choose to terminate his participation in life... And *Homo ludens*, who if life were a game would be the only *verus homo*, would find in that fact his supreme justification.” (Suits 1967a, p. 213)

Second Piece: Suits’ Middle Answers (1971-1989)

The mature precipitate of these early musings is contained in *The Grasshopper*, which stands as Suits’ masterwork and the most cohesive defence of his bifurcate project. The main character of the book, the Grasshopper of Aesop’s fable, “does two things. He advances a definition of games, and he argues that the ideal of existence—that is, Utopia—must consist fundamentally, if not exclusively, in the playing of games” (Suits 1984b, p. 8). Interestingly, Suits conducts his entire inquiry in the form of a Socratic-style dialogue between the Grasshopper character and his disciples, Skepticus and Prudence, but breaks the narrative form to directly ensure his readers that “the expression of my argument is of paramount importance to me, and if there should arise, in the writing of it, a conflict between the presentation of that argument and the narrative form in

which I have chosen to express it, then it is the form that must give way”⁴ (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 174). A review of the central passages contained in Suits’ book, and the constellation of related articles on the philosophy of games that appeared in the period surrounding its publication, will be necessary to ground the reader for what follows in this dissertation.

Suits sets up his utopian thought experiment by considering the possibility that scarcity and hardship might conceivably be forever conquered by unspecified “advances in technology”, and that under such conditions an ‘ant’ life with its meaning grounded in instrumental activity would be absurd (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 10). He defines ‘prudence’ as “the disposition 1/ to sacrifice something good (e.g., leisure) if and only if such sacrifice is necessary for obtaining something better (e.g., survival), and 2/ to reduce the number of good things requiring sacrifice—ideally, at least—to zero” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 10). Prudential actions include work, as we generally work not for work’s own sake, but so that we can enjoy the good of play. He defines ‘work’ as instrumental activity, “doing things we value for the sake of something else”; and ‘play’ as *autotelic* activity, “doing things we value for their own sake” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 17). Work is reviled as “a kind of necessary evil which we accept because it makes it possible for us to do

⁴ This passage alone should be enough to establish Suits’ serious philosophical intentions, and contradict Scott Kretchmar’s reading of the book as the transcript of a one-player game that Suits was playing while writing (Kretchmar 2008, p. 142). To be *playful* in one’s writing style does not imply that one is literally *playing a game* by writing.

things we think of as being good in themselves” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 17). Thus, on Suits’ model, work is tolerable only insofar as it enables autotelic pursuits:

work is good because it provides us with leisure as well as the means to enjoy that leisure. Work is good chiefly because it is *good for* something much better. The things for which it is finally good are goods in themselves. They are intrinsic goods.⁵ (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 14)

Therefore a life consisting solely of instrumental activity, with no autotelic activity as a payoff, would be of extremely low value for Suits—perhaps of no value whatever. Indeed, if we imagine a person with a very low level of physical and cognitive function, whose entire existence revolves around their execution of extremely unpleasant, purely instrumental tasks geared solely towards ensuring their bare survival, we can begin to see the intuitive basis of Suits’ position. Bringing in the spectre of suicide once again, albeit from a different angle, Suits muses that “since the life whose preservation requires continuous toil is just that toil itself, the toiler must well wonder whether the game is worth the candle” (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 14). Less dramatically, he revisits this idea in “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections”: “We work so that we won’t have to work; nothing else makes any sense to me.” (Suits 1984b, p. 10) Here Suits directly echoes Aristotle, who writes: “the whole of life is further divided into two parts,

⁵ In one quote, we have the conflation of the *final*, *intrinsic*, and *autotelic* senses of value for which Suits (and latter-day Suitsians) comes under much fire. I inherit this terminological usage from Suits, but will endeavour to disambiguate whenever these value terms threaten a clear interpretation of his position.

business and leisure... there must be... business for the sake of leisure, things useful and necessary for the sake of things honourable... *what is honourable is better*"⁶ (Aristotle 2000 [c. 350 B.C.E.], §§ 1333a-1333b, emphasis mine). By the same logic, a life consisting *entirely* of autotelic activity is held by Suits to be the "*ideal of existence*" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182).

Play, in contrast to work, is broadly construed as "leisure activities", and gameplay is just one of the many possible kinds of it (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 17). In "Words on Play", Suits goes on to clarify that not *all* autotelic activities—"activities which are ends in themselves" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 217)—are play, but "all instances of play *are* instances of autotelic activity" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 220). This distinction stands because one can imagine *serious* autotelic activities, such as "Aristotle contemplating the Unmoved Mover" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 217), while *all* play is non-serious by definition. The 'serious' attitude also applies to *all* instrumental activities, that is, work, which explains why play is defined as work's "inherent opposite" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 222).

Further, Suits claims that games are not a subspecies of play, because "there is no logical relation whatever between playing and playing games" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 220). This follows from his more formal definition of 'play': "x is playing if and only if x has made a temporary reallocation to autotelic activities of

⁶ Many thanks to Kevin Krein for bringing this passage to my attention, and for crafting a context for it.

resources primarily committed to instrumental purposes” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 225). So professional athletes, for Suits, might well be *playing games* without thereby ‘playing’ in the autotelic sense: there is no reallocation of resources being made in their instance, since they are *working* (pursuing an instrumental end—typically, making money) when they play their games.

Suits has come under significant criticism for this Schopenhauer-derived account of ‘play’ (Morgan 2008, Royce 2011), and indeed for tying play to autotelic activity more generally (Schmid 2009, 2011). Critics claim that Suits’ definition of ‘play’ is flawed on the grounds of being too inclusive in some regards (it looks as if art and contemplation get dragged into the concept if the reallocation of resources is the only relevant criterion), and too exclusive in others (there seems, for instance, to be no good reason why the reallocation of the resources in question must be *temporary*, when a host of play activities made possible by *permanent* reallocations of resources could also plausibly qualify). He attempts to redress these perceived flaws in “Tricky Triad: Games, Play, and Sport” (Suits 1988a), wherein he systematically revises his views on play and, indeed, sport.

Earlier, in the “Elements of Sport”, Suits had defined ‘sport’ as a game with the following necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: “(1) that the game be a game of skill, (2) that the skill be physical, (3) that the game have a wide following, and (4) that the following achieve a certain level of stability” (Suits

2007 [1973], p. 11). The skill clause separates sports from “games of *pure* chance”, because unlike Russian Roulette, sports require the development of novel human capacities that are worthy of admiration (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12). The physicality clause separates sports (which require physical skill) from non-physical games of skill such as chess and bridge (Suits 2007 [1973], pp. 12-13). The wide following clause pre-empts games played, invented, or known of by only one person (we might call these *idiogames*), or only one isolated small group of people⁷ from consideration as sports (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 13). The stability clause introduces an element of temporal durability to the definition of sports to distinguish them from fads (such as playing with a Hula Hoop); and an institutional element to ensure that the activity is sustained, regulated, and refined by teachers, coaches, and researchers (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 13). Later, Suits make a further distinction between two different *kinds of sport*, ‘judged’ versus ‘refereed’ sports, on the basis that

One is a performance and so requires judges. The other is not a performance but a rule-governed interplay of participants, and so requires not judges but law-enforcement officers, that is, referees. Performances require rehearsal, games require practice (Suits 1988a, p. 2).

⁷ The ‘wide following’ clause is prone to a variety of the Sorites paradox: for, if we keep adding individuals who play a given prospective sport, what number of people will constitute the tipping point wherein we might fairly proclaim that it has attained a *wide* following (as opposed to a *narrow* one), and has therefore become a ‘sport’ in the full sense of the term? The answer to this question is not at all clear, and to my knowledge Suits offers no answer to it in his corpus.

As a result, Suits wants to claim that there are *non-game sports* such as diving and gymnastics, in contrast to *game sports* such as baseball and hockey (Suits 1988a, p. 3). Without taking the discussion too far afield, it should be noted that critics of Suits have generated reasonable objections to his position on this matter (Meier 1988, Hurka 2015), and that he has formally responded to some of these criticisms in print (Suits 1989).

In “Tricky Triad”, Suits aims to make a distinction between sports that are *played* autotelically, that is non-instrumentally (which we would typically call *amateur sports*), and sports that are *worked* instrumentally (which we would typically call *professional sports*) (Suits 1988a, p. 8). This same distinction is applied to non-sport games, as amateurs of those games are considered to be ‘playing’ as well, in a sense that professionals are not. The overlapping constellation of the ‘sport’, ‘game’, and ‘play’ concepts yields the following categories (numbered according to their appearance on Suits’ Venn diagram in the article): [3] *non-played non-sport games* (like pro poker); [6] *non-played sport games* (like pro hockey); [7] *non-played non-game sports* (like pro figure skating); and on the other hand [4] *played non-game sports* (like amateur gymnastics) and [5] *played sport games* (like amateur baseball). With the introduction of a further distinction between *primitive* (unskilled, undirected) [1] *non-sport non-game play* (like a baby splashing water around) and *sophisticated* (skilled, directed) [2] *non-*

sport game play (like Monopoly or Hearts), Suits completes his typology (Suits 1988a, p. 2).

For both amateurs and professionals, in Suits' schema games can "be the object of an ultimate, or unqualified, commitment" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 31); despite the consideration that in the typical case "games are in some sense non-serious undertakings" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 29), and that "supreme dedication to a game... may be repugnant to nearly everyone's moral sense" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 30). Suits' claim here regarding games jars somewhat with his later statement, in "Sticky Wickedness: Games and Morality", that "game playing is a bad guide for moral conduct... to treat life as a game by regarding our goals as goals in games is to trivialize our goals... In life goals are valued; in games, I suggest, they are exploited" (Suits 1982, p. 757). For if Suits' later attitude toward the goals of gameplay is considered authoritative, then it would appear to contradict both (a) his earlier revelation thesis, that realizing that life is a game (whose ruleset would obviously command ultimate allegiance) would be potentially ennobling and emancipatory for humankind (Suits 1967a, p. 213); and also (b) his utopian thesis, wherein utopian life is portrayed as being *both* normatively desirable *and* as an endless string of games being played (Suits 2014 [1978], Chapter 15).⁸ If a life entirely consisting of gameplay is, of necessity, morally bankrupt, then neither

⁸ Suits more precisely describes utopian society as "a series—indeed a network—of interlocking games" in *Return of the Grasshopper* (Suits 19--c, p. 78).

thesis (a) nor (b) are viable. Therefore, due to the centrality of both thesis (a) and (b) to Suits' overall schema, I argue that we must take his outlier position in "Sticky Wickedness" to be non-authoritative.

Regarding the relationship of game players and their attitudes toward the games they play, Suits introduces the concept of 'institutions' of games, "which can be distinguished from any individual game" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 49). He is explicit when correcting his critics (Schneider and Butcher 1997) that his concept of 'institution' should by no means be confused with something like "a kind of Platonic ideal chess game such that the chess games people play in everyday life are related to it in the same way that instances are related to a universal" (Suits 2006, p. 2). The relevant distinction, for Suits, is rather brought out with the example of a 'descriptive' checkmate versus a 'prescriptive' checkmate in chess. In the descriptive case, a board position illustrating a hypothetical checkmate can be demonstrated without any chess game occurring, and Suits claims such a demonstration relies solely on the *institution* of chess for it to make sense. In the prescriptive case, however, the state of checkmate can only be brought about by lusory means explicitly in line with the game's *ruleset* (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 48-49). The descriptive case requires *knowledge of* chess rules as an institution; the prescriptive case requires active *obedience to* those rules for a game to be played.

For Suits, “while *players* acknowledge the claims of both the game and its institution, *triflers* and *cheats* acknowledge only institutional claims, and *spoilsports* acknowledge neither” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 51, emphases mine) This is because triflers do not seek to achieve the prescribed prelusory goal of a game; they rather seek goals of their own invention or preference *within* the rules of that game, which demonstrates disobedience to the intended lusory goal of winning specified by the constitutive rules, although surface obedience to these must be exhibited in order for other players to continue to allow their trifling (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 50). For the cheat, on the other hand, “continuing to operate in terms of the institution is a necessary condition of his exploitation of the game and of his opponent”, because although cheating requires direct disobedience of the rules, good knowledge of them must be demonstrated in order to ‘sell’ the cheat as a felicitous move (or part of a series of felicitous moves) in the game to other players (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 50). Finally, a spoilsport is someone who has *no* genuine intention to play a particular game (pursue its prelusory goal) *or* display general knowledge of its rules, and thus acknowledges neither the game nor its institution (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 51).

These archetypes of pseudo-players reappear in Suits’ unpublished work as the worst possible villains in his utopia of gameplay. For Suits’ utopians must play an endless series of games to defeat the boredom of having nothing instrumental left to do, and to give non-neurotic vent to their competitive urges.

Indeed, the only scarce goods which remain in utopia are artificially created by game rules. Everything extralusory can be had in excess there, without effort; but intralusory resources (whether these are game pieces, positions on a board, or a history of accrued wins) require effort to acquire.⁹ This is partly why Suits insists that “Cheating in a game is a special kind of theft... For it amounts to decreasing the opportunities of the other players below the level to which they have title by playing whatever game it is they are playing—by, if you like, having mixed their labor (their time and effort) with the game” (Suits 19--c, p. 120). Cheating is thus the only intelligible form of theft that can remain in Suits’ post-instrumental utopia, since games are the only occasions utopians have to earn anything remotely like what we would consider in pre-utopian society as private property.¹⁰ But it is the *spoilsports* who are, surprisingly, singled out by Suits as especially pernicious utopian criminals, because

in our lusory Utopia spoilsports would be guilty of a greater immorality than would cheats. For while cheats are lusory thieves, spoilsports are lusory murderers. And since

⁹ If it turns out to be the case that utopian lifespans are infinitely extensible, however, then presumably even *this* scarcity is trivial. For, given an unlimited amount of time, utopians could play an infinitude of games, and even with a win rate as low as 25%, that would be a $\frac{1}{4}$ infinity of wins: a non-scarce amount, by any measure. In our world of limited lifespans, the opportunities for acquiring the intralusory good of a win are much more circumscribed: it would have to be calculated by our mean skill levels multiplied by the number of games we play, modified by the influence of said skills on the outcomes of our chosen games.

¹⁰ Although cheating might never occur in utopia either, since immoral desires and behaviour are ruled out there *a priori* by Suits (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185) So a desire for another’s possessions *or* intralusory resources should never occur to a utopian, and thus should never be acted on by their wish-granting supercomputers. Even without this stipulation, it would be exceptionally perverse in a world of infinite plenitude to desire *your neighbour’s car* over *a car like your neighbour’s in every conceivable regard that you can acquire simply by pressing a button*.

playing games is, to borrow an Aristotelian locution, the proper *ergon* of humanity, spoilsports commit an offense against humanity itself (Suits 19--c, p. 122).

In this passage, we see the deforming effects of trying to understand post-utopian morality with our pre-utopian outlook. Suits asks us to imagine what life would look like if there was no extraludic point of moral reference with which to potentially override our “supreme dedication to a game” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 30), and in this instance it is a deeply disturbing picture, wherein *spoilsports can be found guilty of crimes against humanity for no greater offence than refusing to play games*.

Foreshadowing the topic of scarcity in utopian games, Suits offers a definition of ‘efficiency’ as “the least expenditure of a limited resource necessary to achieve a given goal” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 57). Resources that are pertinent to, and limited in, ludic activities include (but are not exhausted by): time, moves, pieces, information, and skills. For Suits, “time, or any other potential resource, should not be called an *actual* resource unless it is viewed in relation to some goal, and it should not be called a *limited* resource unless it sets a limit, or limits, to the kind and number of my goals” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 58, emphases mine). If time is not being employed to realize some purpose, it can be a liability (as in Suits’ examples of bored and tortured people) or count for nothing at all; and if one’s goals are extremely modest then time is, for Suits’ intents and purposes, a resource that will always be sufficiently available and thus not ‘limited’, in the

sense of being scarce (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 58). If any resource is *unlimited*, then no considerations of efficiency or inefficiency regarding its use can be brought to bear¹¹ (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 57), meaning that it be cannot employed as a strategic consideration in any game's 'rule of skill'.

Rules of skill advise the maximally efficient and skilful use of lusory means to achieve prelusory goals, and are typically instantiated by "injunctions to keep your eye on the ball, to refrain from trumping your partner's ace, and the like" (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 39-40). Whereas the constitutive rules of a game necessarily dictate *inefficiency* in the *selection* of lusory means, rules of skill necessarily dictate *efficiency* in the *use* of the lusory means thereby selected. Thus it is that if I elect to accept the constitutive rules implicit in entering a labyrinth "my purpose is not just to *be* outside (as it might be if Ariadne were waiting for me to emerge), but to *get* out of the labyrinth, so to speak, labyrinthically" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 34); and the rules of skill would non-paradoxically dictate that "once committed to that end, moreover, I would strive to accomplish it as efficiently as possible" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 25). The game rules dictate the lusory means, and thereby the skills that can be felicitously employed to overcome obstacles to achieving the prelusory goal; but the skills thereby selected can be deployed with the utmost efficiency in gameplay.

¹¹ A comment which has direct bearing on projections of life in his utopia of material superabundance.

Suits's attachment to the logical primacy of game rulesets is such that he believes that human capacities can be optimized (and arguably even created) by their use. Let us call this the *capacity thesis*: "if no one had ever used his feet before the invention of foot racing, then foot racing would require the inventions of running, and so pacing, sprinting, and passing would be as much instituted moves as are the moves in chess" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 51). Against an essentialist account of sport such as Jon Pike's (Pike 2018), which would insist that foot racing is the way it is because we naturally have the kinds of bodies we do, Suits counters with a formalist view—it is *game rules* that dictate how bodies move in a game; *how bodies move* outwith a game does not dictate game rules. On his account, it is merely accidental that foot racing happens to emulate a naturally-occurrent form of locomotion. In "The Elements of Sport", Suits put the matter like this:

Some kinds of games—such as racing games—have this rather obvious affinity with actions performed aside from games. But most games do not have such a clear counterpart in ordinary life... there is nothing in life which much resembles baseball or football or golf *in toto*... Thus, with the invention of games far removed from the pursuits of ordinary life, quite new capacities emerge, and hitherto unknown skills are developed (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12).

It is crucial to dog-ear this quotation in order to arrive at a more nuanced reading of Suits' utopian vision. For, if any human desire whatsoever is granted in Suits' utopia by his "automated machines which are activated solely by mental

telepathy”¹² (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182), and it seems that they are; and if the desire for a ludically-optimized augmented or transmogrified body is an intelligible utopian desire, and it seems that it is; then playing utopian games aided by the wish-granting machinery will *literally* reshape the body in real time according to the players’ whims. Thus it appears that flying sports, deep-sea swimming sports, and outer-space sports are all on the menu in the utopian game room.¹³ However, it could plausibly be countered that unbounded fluidity in the human form would make sport impossible in utopia, since well-designed sports *are* well-designed specifically *because* they account for the average powers of the human body in their rulesets, thus creating the dramatic tensions

¹² I’ve had many occasions to wonder what Suits’ term ‘*mental* telepathy’ is meant to be specified in opposition to. *Physical* telepathy? As that seems implausible, I take the phrase to be redundant.

¹³ Seemingly counter to this intuition, Suits writes elsewhere that in a life “worth living... death would be incorporated into such a life as one of its necessary conditions” (Suits 19--c, p. 52). Moreover, “If one’s life could be made into a game... [and] if a game is the kind of thing that necessarily ends, then by intending to play my excellent game I would necessarily intend it to end, win or lose. And since playing the game would be the same as living my life, I would intend both to live that attractive life and I would also intend it to end” (Suits 19--c, p. 53). So it appears that mortality is accepted by Suits as an unalterable condition of life, utopian or otherwise. He says as much in *The Grasshopper* when he states that “it is true that time is, alas, for all of us a finite quantity” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 58). This means that there is at least one type of non-lusory scarcity which exists in Suits’ utopia: temporal scarcity. But if temporal scarcity existed in Suits’ utopia, then an *instrumental need for more time* would exist too, and so presumably the telepathically-controlled utopian supercomputers could be used to effect an indefinite extension of one’s lifespan. Ironically, time is exactly that resource whose reallocation from instrumental purposes permits the possibility of non-game *play* in Suits’ “Words on Play” (Suits 1977). So: if mortality is a feature of Suits’ utopia, then this implies that *not* all instrumental activities can be eliminated therein, for there will always be room for instrumental activities geared toward extending one’s lifespan (attempting to overcome temporal scarcity); alternately, if Suits’ utopians are instead immortal, then time would be an unlimited resource in utopia, and therefore it could not be *reallocated* to non-game play, since it would already be permanently allocated to gameplay.

that they do.¹⁴ This subject will be explored more fully in the final chapter of this dissertation.

Finally, Suits advances a stronger version of the themes introduced in “Is Life a Game We Are Playing?”, suggesting that “everyone alive is in fact engaged in playing elaborate games, while at the same time believing themselves to be going about their ordinary affairs. Carpenters... politicians, philosophers, lovers, murderers, thieves, and saints. Whatever occupation or activity you can think of, it is in reality a game”¹⁵ (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 11). However, those that become conscious of the unconscious games they are playing via the Grasshopper’s discursive persuasion cease to exist completely (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 12), a return to the idea that a life consisting entirely of gameplay must either compel one to commit suicide or accept a new ideology which embraces gameplay as the moral ideal of existence—and neither of these binary options preserves the status quo. As this suggestion is left unelaborated and undefended in the text, very few have directly commented on Suits’ mysterious musing: “Is the carpenter

¹⁴ Many thanks to Jon Pike for sharing this line of insight.

¹⁵ Murderers and thieves at least, and perhaps lovers as well, are *prima facie* poor candidates for what we might call *unconscious gameplay*. But as we have seen, Suits is not merely playing it loose with his prose here—he is graphically illustrating his earlier logical point, that anyone could discover at any time that they had been unconsciously playing a game all along; regardless of how horrific its prelusory goal turned out to be.

on his roof-top simply hammering nails, or is he making some move in an ancient game whose rules he has forgotten?” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 12)

My interpretation of this quotation is that he is referencing the subject matter of an earlier unpublished typeset fragment, also likely written in this same period, entitled “Myth for a Moral Cosmogony”. In this piece, Suits describes a Golden Age, a paradise wherein

the inhabitants... were bored to distraction... What is needed is already at hand, and so not needed at all. Between wish and act no shadow falls. There is literally nothing to do. (Suits 19--a, p. 1)

The proto-utopians in this piece go on to save themselves from their condition of existentially meaningless material superabundance by constraining themselves to unnecessary rules governing their activities; in other words, they reintroduce scarcity by turning their lives into a series of games, and thus rescue themselves from their condition of endless paradisal boredom. However, time passes, generation follows generation, and the proto-utopians forget the origin of their striving games—that they *chose* to play them—and come to think that scarcity and the striving required to address it is *necessary*, rather than simply *desirable* from the point of view of the paradisal condition. Achieving a condition wherein striving is completely *unnecessary* becomes the new social ideal once the actual lived conditions of the original Golden Age are completely forgotten. When these proto-utopians eventually succeed in (re)realizing their paradisal condition

through their hard work, they soon (re)experience the torments of perpetual boredom, necessitating the (re)introduction of striving games, thus completing the cycle.

Suits' underlying model of human history, in other words, is an eternally swinging pendulum, alternating between stultifying material superabundance brought on by adopting a prudential attitude toward eliminating work, and a completely absorbing (albeit distressing) material scarcity brought on by adopting a lusory attitude toward life. He reasserts this conviction in his unpublished but completed sequel to *The Grasshopper*, entitled *The Return of the Grasshopper*: "whenever ant industry abolishes the need for that industry and ants find themselves possessed of the dreadful freedom of grasshoppers, their ant obsessiveness reasserts itself, and so Utopia is found only to be thrown away again and again" ¹⁶ (Suits 19--c, p. 82).

Third Piece: Suits' Late Refinements (2004-2006)

After a long period wherein Suits did no academic publishing (1990-2003), he reappeared with two articles on the philosophy of sport, "Venn and the Art of Category Maintenance" (Suits 2004) and "Games and their Institutions in the

¹⁶ This cosmological reading of Suits somewhat vindicates recent quasi-ecclesiastical interpretations of his utopian thesis, such as that of Deborah Vossen's, who identifies Suits' utopia as 'Heaven' (Vossen 2016).

Grasshopper” (Suits 2006), just before his death in early 2007. The first of these articles constitutes a sustained defence of his earlier work in “Tricky Triad” (Suits 1988a) from the criticisms of Angela Schneider (Schneider 2001); the second constitutes a sustained defence of his earlier work in *The Grasshopper* (Suits 2014 [1978]) from the criticisms of Angela Schneider and Robert Butcher (Schneider and Butcher 1997). In both cases, the contents functioned as refinements on his earlier positions, rather than providing major reformulations, or new positions altogether.

From our preceding discussion, I believe it is fair to conclude that Suits’ ‘middle’ period provides us with both the bulk of his published and unpublished corpus, and also the most philosophically rich pieces. During that period, he ambitiously extended his moderate definitionist thesis across multiple areas of philosophical inquiry, and while providing consistently illuminating analysis, internal inconsistencies often appear when we attempt to analyse his work holistically. On the topic of morality in games, he tells us that games are a corrupting metaphor for our moral lives; and yet the realization that our lives are games is also said to be emancipating in the present—and the ‘ideal of existence’ in the future. In some pieces, he claims that professionals count as ‘game players’ in the sense of being in full obedience to the rules; in others, he excludes professionals from the set of ‘game players’ on the basis that they lack purely autotelic motivations. Paradox also seems just around the corner in his

discussions of his utopian vision: wherein natural scarcity is completely banished, but artificial scarcity is recreated at the beginning of every game; wherein utopians are free to do whatever they want, but all utopians will want to do is play games; wherein the finest human capacities will be realized, but there is seemingly no further point in realizing them.

Nevertheless, Suits' work leaves us with a repository of many valuable insights, and questions for our further consideration. Does Suits get the best of Wittgenstein in his definitionist attack on the family resemblance thesis? Is usage of the telepathically-controlled machinery that enables his utopian vision conceptually problematic in the same sense that usage of Robert Nozick's experience machine is thought to be? Is it possible to exhibit *virtue* in a utopia of gameplay? Can *boredom-induced suicide* be avoided in a materially superabundant, post-instrumental utopia? What are *utopian games*, and how are they different from the games we play in the present? Can we make apparently meaningless activities meaningful through an act of will, by *gaming them up*? Is there a possible alternate reading of Suits' utopian thesis, such that some of the notable inconsistencies in his account can be adequately addressed? In the following chapters, I offer answers to each of these questions, and go deeper on relevant points of interest in the work of Suits, his critics, and thinkers working in related fields.

In Chapter 1, I ground Suits' position of moderate definitionism in theoretical opposition to Ludwig Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis. I conclude, with Colin McGinn, Thomas Hurka, and others that Suits gets the better of Wittgenstein on this issue. Then I turn to examine issues generated by the combination of Suits' definition of 'gameplay' with his *utopian thesis*: the argument that the '*ideal of existence*' for humankind is a utopia of gameplay. I argue that Suits' utopia is vulnerable to a parallel critique to that posed against Robert Nozick's experience machine, but in Chapter 2 I demonstrate that those objections are ultimately unconvincing. In Chapter 3 I hold that—appearances to the contrary—virtuous behaviour is a live possibility for his utopians. The *crisis of leisure* in Suits' utopia that he refers to as the 'Alexandrian condition' draws into question whether a life consisting exclusively of gameplay is sufficiently meaningful to overcome utopian *ennui* and suicidal urges—a dilemma I resolve in Chapter 4 by developing a typology of two different types of utopians, and two functionally different types of utopian games they might play. In Chapter 5, I argue that utopian games-by-design are outside of our contemporary ability to adequately conceptualize, because there is an unbridgeable cultural gap between utopians and ourselves. Suits' assertion that we have a 'duty to design' these games therefore falls flat. Further, in Chapter 6 I give an account of what constitutes good games and explain how the technique of *ludic alchemy* can gamify and infuse meaning into otherwise mundane activities. Finally, in Chapter

7 I rehabilitate Suits' utopian thesis along perfectionist lines, and show that its main value lies in its role as a regulative ideal, offering unique normative recommendations for our current gaming practices.

Chapter 1: ‘A Longer and More Penetrating Look’: Suits’ Definitions of ‘Gameplay’ and ‘Utopia’

Wittgenstein, one of the most forceful spokesmen... for the anti-definitional attitude, is famous for having singled out the attempt to define games as illustrating *par excellence* the futility of attempting to define anything whatever. ‘Don’t say,’ Wittgenstein admonishes us, “there must be something common or they would not be called ‘games’”—but *look and see* whether there is anything common to all. This is unexceptional advice. Unfortunately, Wittgenstein himself did not follow it. He looked, to be sure, but because he had decided beforehand that games are undefinable, his look was fleeting, and he saw very little. So I invite the reader to join me in a longer and more penetrating look at games, and to defer judgment as to whether all games have something in common pending completion of such an inspection (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 1-2).

In attempting to define the concept ‘game’ in *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*, Bernard Suits mounts a limited defence of moderate *definitionalism*: the position that some (but not necessarily all) concepts admit of being analysed into a set of necessary and sufficient conditions. In doing this, Suits places himself in theoretical opposition to Ludwig Wittgenstein, who claimed in *Philosophical Investigations* that the concept ‘game’, and most others, were *not* suitable candidates for definition. Rather, Wittgenstein holds that particular instances of games can only be connected to each other through a fuzzy *family resemblance* relationship at best. That is, they do not have universally shared necessary and sufficient conditions, but rather “a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities in detail” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], § 66).

In this chapter I use the contrast between Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis and Suits' moderate definitionalist effort—to arrive at a set of necessary and sufficient conditions for the concept 'game'—as a natural entry point for discussion of Suits' intellectual project more generally, and to analyse its metaphilosophical stakes. For if Suits is correct, then Wittgenstein was wrong, and anti-definitionalist philosophy is misguided. I conclude, with Colin McGinn and Thomas Hurka, that Suits' definition of 'game' as "the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43) is compelling—acting as a persuasive refutation of Wittgenstein, and a redemption of limited definitionism.

However, I criticise Suits' later attempt to define the concept of 'utopia' as being unconvincing and less useful than that offered by J.C. Davis. For Suits' definition of 'utopia' as a state of affairs wherein "all of the instrumental activities of human beings have been eliminated" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182), resulting in a state of logically necessitated perpetual gameplay for utopians, produces a seeming contradiction with his earlier definition of 'game'. For games in his utopia would therefore be *non-voluntary attempts to overcome necessary obstacles*. Utopian games would thus be *anti-games*, or *work*. I will attempt to remedy this apparent contradiction, and to provide a more consistent explanation of how Suits' concept of 'game' is related to his concept of 'utopia'.

1.1 Wittgenstein's 'Family Resemblances' Thesis

In *Philosophical Investigations*, Ludwig Wittgenstein argues that many concepts, including the concept 'game', are necessarily vague and do not admit of precise definition. For Wittgenstein, the way to understand what 'game' means is via a process of "*seeing what is common*" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §72) among the suspected members of a set, which is to say correctly identifying "the various resemblances between members of a family" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §67). So it is that Wittgenstein can look and find resemblances between board games (like Monopoly) and card games (like Hearts) in that both employ pieces of cardstock; in card games (like contract bridge) and ball games (like doubles tennis) in that both must be played with a partner; in ball games (like snooker) and track and field events (like pole vaulting) in that both require the skilful manipulation of long pieces of wood; and so on and so forth until "we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §66). This 'family resemblance' thesis constitutes an attack on *strong* definitionalism, the position that *all* concepts must admit of clearly-delineated boundaries, cashed out as a set of necessary and sufficient conditions, to be meaningful. Wittgenstein asks that we, instead:

Look for example at board-games, with their multifarious relationships. Now pass to card-games; here you find many correspondences with the first group, but many common features drop out, and others appear. When we pass next to ball-games, much that is common is retained, but much is lost.—Are they all 'amusing'? Compare chess

with noughts and crosses. Or is there always winning and losing, or competition between players? Think of patience. In ball games there is winning and losing; but when a child throws his ball at the wall and catches it again, this feature has disappeared. Look at the parts played by skill and luck; and at the difference between skill in chess and skill in tennis. Think now of games like ring-a-ring-a-roses; here is the element of amusement, but how many other characteristic features have disappeared! And we can go through the many, many other groups of games in the same way; can see how similarities crop up and disappear (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §66).

To better understand what Wittgenstein means by his family resemblance thesis, let's consider a concrete example. Imagine a *literal* family where the mother's hair is curly [C] and the father's is straight [S]; and the father has buck teeth [B], while the mother has an underbite [U]. For Wittgenstein, it is the daughter of these two parents, with her curly hair and buck teeth, that properly connects these three in the same family group. It is only necessary that each of the members of a set share at least one trait with one other member of the set; so the fact that the father [SB] and the mother [CU] share no notable qualities is not an issue, as long as both have a sufficient overlap of similarities with the daughter [CB]. Just as one must become acquainted with a family before one can assert their linking traits, Wittgenstein holds that the process of defining a concept *a priori* is futile, because first we must "*look and see... don't think, but look!*" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §66) Stipulating a concept in advance, on Wittgenstein's account, would make us blind to the world as it actually is: this is the professional vice of the archetypal philosopher, which Wittgenstein's anti-philosophical therapy is aimed at ameliorating. His metaphilosophical aim is rather to "shew the fly the way out of the fly-bottle" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958],

§309) by arriving at a method by which “philosophical problems should *completely* disappear” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §133).

1.2 Objections to Wittgenstein

As influential as Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis has proven to be, his account is objectionable on multiple grounds. From one perspective, the thesis seems to be too *inclusive*, in that it provides no reliable criteria for excluding unwanted members from a resemblance set, for the web of resemblances is indefinitely extensible. As Wittgenstein asserts, “the extension of the concept is *not* closed by a frontier” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §68). From another perspective, the theory seems too *exclusive* in that it provides no reliable criteria for including desired members in a resemblance set, for any reason that is *distinct* from considerations of resemblance (such as purpose or function). Lastly, it appears that some form of conceptual analysis such as Suits’ definitionism may be the most efficient and accurate means for parsing a large set of concepts—including Wittgenstein’s chosen example of ‘game’.

Mary Midgely takes Wittgenstein to task for mistaking surface resemblances for deeper conceptual connections. She offers the following *reductio ad absurdum* of his theory: “Elliot’s need not have the Elliot Countenance at all; they may be quite untypical, and plausible looking Tichborne Claimants

need not be Tichbornes” (Midgley 1974, p. 232). In other words, things that merely *look like* members of a family *might not* belong to that family, and things that *do not look like* they do belong there, actually *might*; for there are possible *non-family resemblances*, and *family non-resemblances* as well as *family resemblances* and *non-family non-resemblances*. Midgely’s point is this: the lack of a family resemblance relation does not *endanger* the objective status of a familial relationship on a deeper (in this case biological) level, nor does the presence of resemblance necessarily *confer* any relation on a deeper level.

Maurice Mandelbaum makes a similar point against Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis when he argues that there would be no way to distinguish fortune-telling from playing a solitaire variant on the resemblance model, due to the strong physical resemblance between the two activities. Nevertheless, it is evident that “ordinary usage would not... sanction our describing fortune-telling as an example of playing a game, no matter how striking may be the resemblances between the ways in which cards are handled in playing solitaire and in telling fortunes” (Mandelbaum 1965, p. 220). As one of the main professed virtues of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis is its conformity with ordinary language usage—whose inexactitude does not worry him as regards the task of explanation (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §69)—Mandelbaum’s underscoring of the potential disconnect between the loose and subjective technique of “*seeing what is common*” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §72) in a family resemblance, and the

relatively calcified conventions which govern ordinary language usage, constitutes a site of potential tension in Wittgenstein's account.

As Mandelbaum claims, it *does* seem as if Wittgenstein concentrates mostly on the superficial physical or behaviouristic components of games when grouping them together as a family. Using the Wittgensteinian mode of inquiry, we might look at a small set of games such as chess, which uses pieces and a board; Scrabble, which uses a board and tiles; and Mahjong, which uses tiles and dice, and conclude that in terms of family resemblance, Scrabble 'resembles' chess because both use boards, and Scrabble 'resembles' Mahjong because both use tiles. So far, so intuitive. But this chain of connections has no definite end for Wittgenstein:

For how is the concept of a game bounded? What still counts as a game and what no longer does? Can you give the boundary? No. You can *draw* one; for none has so far been drawn (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §68).

And so, if the chain of resemblances is indeed as indefinitely extensible as Wittgenstein claims they are, then this will lead his family resemblance thesis into murky waters as we proceed to actually extend them. For Scrabble *also* resembles repairing a roof, because both use boards; and Scrabble *also* resembles tiling a bathroom floor, because both use tiles. And although builders repairing roofs and tiling floors do not consider themselves to be game players, if

we look only to resemblance to guide our conceptual understanding, then they can be insinuated into the ‘gamer’ family, like it or not.¹⁷

This problem is paralleled, as Colin McGinn rightly observes, “with other concepts: the concept *gold* is not the same as the concept *resembles gold* and the concept *husband* is not the same as the concept *resembles husbands*... it is not sufficient for being an *F* that an object *looks like* an *F*” (McGinn 2012, p. 18). On these intuitively plausible grounds, I am compelled to agree with McGinn, Midgely, and Mandelbaum that Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis makes the concept ‘game’—and, indeed, every other concept akin to it that we accept as possessing “blurred edges” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §72)—unnecessarily vague and inclusive.

Wittgenstein could possibly defend against this objection by reference to his concern with adherence to ordinary language usage, replying that his target is only “the proceedings that we *call* ‘games’” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §66, emphasis mine), and since we don’t *call* roof-repairing and floor-tiling games, they are therefore not fair candidates for family resemblance relationships *with* games. However, deference to ordinary language usage does not explain *why* it is that we call Scrabble a *game*, and other superficially-relatable activities, like

¹⁷ Imagine an intelligent alien coming to Earth, armed only with Wittgenstein’s family resemblance model of concepts: to the alien, the floor-tiler might very well look to be playing a solitaire version of Mahjong, flipping tiles and placing them in patterned sets according to their colours.

tiling, *non-games*; nor how the *first game* could emerge, with neither pre-existing linguistic conventions nor possible comparisons in terms of family resemblance to render it intelligible (McGinn 2012, p. 33, n. 5). In the face of these considerations, it seems like we must have something like an intuitive (at least tentative) working definition in mind *before* we begin to call certain activities ‘games’, regardless of whether or not we are fully cognizant of it. Without such a working definition—as noted—mere resemblance has the potential to endlessly hypertrophy the concept ‘game’ until *all* human activities could be called games-by-resemblance. Midgley raises a parallel concern regarding the concept ‘chair’: “*before* we could usefully look at those candidates for chairhood, we had to do some sort of thinking” (Midgley 1974, p. 244). If the concept ‘game’ precedes the labelling of particular activities *as* games (as seems must be the case), then the family resemblance relation as stated does no *explanatory* work: “*seeing what is common*” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §72) is actually just our projection of our implicit pre-existing conceptual frameworks upon the world. Therefore, as McGinn asserts, “we should not be *empiricists* about the concept of a game” (McGinn 2012, p. 27), but rather attempt to arrive at a greater degree of clarity through our analysis of *concepts*.

McGinn demonstrates how Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis is internally incoherent as regards the concept ‘game’ because the parameters for inclusion are “hopelessly weak”; letting in numerous non-game activities such as

“running for buses, swimming to save a life, working at a computer... throwing spears at buffalo, planning a battle on a board, reading a map, gambling, walking” (McGinn 2012, p. 29). Moreover, McGinn takes the family resemblance thesis to be inconsistent, in that it implicitly affirms what it holds to be impossible; by asserting “a necessary condition for being a game: [namely,] *having a family resemblance to things called ‘games’*” (McGinn 2012, p. 18), which also turns out to be a *sufficient* condition on Wittgenstein’s account. Since the family resemblance thesis draws its justification from its supposed power to address perceived deficiencies in definitional strategies of providing necessary and sufficient conditions for concepts, because the search for a “disjunction of... common properties” is presumed by Wittgenstein to be futile (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §67), this amounts to a contradiction. Indeed, the identification of *any* ‘common property’ across the set of games will constitute a refutation of Wittgenstein on this point; and McGinn offers an embarrassment of unobjectionable necessary conditions for the concept ‘game’:

All games are surely activities (not substances), and presumably they are all intentional activities, and as such goal-directed (even if the goal is just to have some fun). If so, all games involve intention and will, which themselves involve belief and desire, which involve the idea of a rational agent: these are all necessary conditions of playing a game... all games are necessarily rule-governed intentional activities (McGinn 2012, pp. 19-20).

Having highlighted some of the more serious defects of Wittgenstein’s family resemblance thesis, let us now turn to its theoretical competition, Suits’

moderate definitionism, as exemplified by his positive definition of ‘gameplay’; that “playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43). The metaphilosophical significance of Suits’ definition is that it refutes Wittgenstein’s negative antiphilosophy, which focuses on what *cannot* be said, in favour of the positive position that “the nature of philosophy turns on the question of whether illuminating definition is attainable” (McGinn 2012, p. 22); which thereby valorises analytic conceptual inquiry. Thomas Hurka recognizes that for Suits, “in giving necessary and sufficient conditions for a game he’s doing exactly what Wittgenstein says can’t be done, and doing it about Wittgenstein’s own example” (Hurka 2014, p. xiv). To fully understand Suits’ refutation of Wittgenstein’s position, we must conduct a closer analysis of Suits’ moderate definitionist thesis.

1.3 Suits’ Moderate Definitionist Thesis

Suits explicitly defines ‘gameplay’ (in its longer formulation) in the following passage, reproduced here for ease of reference:

To play a game is to attempt to achieve a specific state of affairs [prelusory goal], using only means permitted by the rules [lusory means], where the rules prohibit use of more efficient in favour of less efficient means [constitutive rules], and where the rules are accepted just because they make possible such activity [lusory attitude]. I also offer the following simpler and, so to speak, more portable version of the above: playing a game is a voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43).

Let us consider each component of Suits' definition separately. The 'prelusory goal' is agreed to prior to the game and can be described separately from it. Such goals are unrestricted in scope and can range in type from getting a ball through a hoop (in basketball), to manoeuvring a certain game piece (say, an opponent's king in chess) into a certain position (checkmate), to climbing Mount Everest. To achieve a prelusory goal through lusory means is also to achieve the *lusory goal* of *winning* a game (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 38-39). A game with a *conceptually* unrealisable prelusory goal (like drawing a squared circle) is *essentially* a 'bad' (poorly-designed) game, while a game with a *practically* unrealisable prelusory goal (like shooting a basketball through a 500-meter-high hoop, or a form of chess with a million unique pieces per side) is only a *contingently* bad game (under different circumstances they could be good; these might be games whose time has not yet come, and will not come until reliably functional rocket boots and super-effective neural enhancement biomodifications become commercially available).

The 'constitutive rules' *proscribe* players from taking the most direct and efficient route to achieving the game's prelusory goal (such forbidden routes to victory might include using one's fingers to secure an egg to a spoon in an egg-and-spoon race, for example, or discharging a firearm to 'knock out' one's boxing opponent): let us call this the *inefficiency principle*. Constitutive rules also *prescribe* the acceptable inefficient routes to victory (balancing an egg on a spoon

whilst traversing a pre-specified distance on foot to a finish line; or hitting an opponent with your gloved fist more times than you are hit by your opponent's gloved fist for a pre-specified amount of time), which Suits calls 'lusory means'. These elements are bound together by the 'lusory attitude', the presence of which signifies a willingness to play on the part of the player: their tacit or explicit acceptance of the constitutive rules as contractually binding them, and the other players, to adhering to lusory means for achieving prelusory goals, for the activity's own sake.

Taken in the negative, this definition stipulates that any activity with no clear goal, unconstrained by rules, or lacking the proper volitional intent in its would-be players, should *not* be called a 'game', regardless of its outward resemblances to other games. The lack of a prelusory goal explains why, on Suits' account, that "Ring Around the Rosie and the like are not games, for they are... *scripted* undertakings; that is, activities whose execution is prescribed beforehand, as in a theatrical performance or ceremonial ritual" ¹⁸ (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 97-98). Similarly, an abandonment of lusory means explains why shooting your opponent in the head is an unacceptable strategy in boxing (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 39); an abandonment of constitutive rules explains why cutting across the infield is not participating in a footrace (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 41); and

¹⁸ Here, too, Suits is at odds with Wittgenstein—remember that "ring-a-ring-a-roses" is one of the activities that Wittgenstein unreflectively includes in his core set of sample games (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §66); Suits excludes it on principle.

an abandonment of the lusory attitude explains why psychologically compulsive activity does not count as a ‘game’ in the literal sense of the term (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 165).

Let us recall Hurka’s sympathetic finesse on Suits’ framework, wherein he refers to the definition as consisting of *three* ‘nested’ components (he considers *lusory means* to be indistinguishable from *constitutive rules*, as the former is completely determined by the latter):

Its third element, the lusory attitude, is defined in terms of its second, the constitutive rules, since it involves an attitude to those rules, namely one of accepting them. And its second element is defined in terms of its first, since the rules restrict how you may pursue the prelusory goal (Hurka 2014, p. xiii).

For Hurka, noting the *nestedness* of the definition’s clauses is not merely a matter of cleaning up Suits’ prose, as “the resulting unity is part of its philosophical power” (Hurka 2014, p. xiii). Nor does the definition’s imperfect fit with ordinary language usage (*including* mountain-climbing in the set of games (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 90-92), while *excluding* Ring Around the Rosie) count as a demerit against Suits, as such ‘minor mismatches’ need not be “serious objections to... a conceptual analysis if the analysis picks out a phenomenon that’s unified, close to what’s meant by ‘game’, and philosophically important” (Hurka 2014, p. xiii)—as Suits’ analysis does. Thus, in Hurka’s eyes, Suits’ moderate definitionalist effort “shows up the superficiality of Wittgenstein’s discussion” (Hurka 2014, p. xiv) and

puts philosophy back on the tracks toward positive conceptual analysis; away from the epistemically pessimistic fuzziness of family resemblance.

While Suits' definitional efforts have indeed been widely lauded, forming the theoretical backbone of much contemporary work in the philosophy of sport, his work has also generated a wide breadth of critiques of varying persuasiveness. In the next section, I discuss some of the most popular arguments marshalled against Suits' definition and address the most troubling of these from the point of view of the ultimate aim of this dissertation, which is a critical analysis of Suits' utopia of gameplay. For I, like Hurka, believe that what constitutes the main philosophical significance of Suits' work is not simply his definition of 'gameplay' as a concept, but also that he identifies gameplay as a "key human good, and... explains *why* game-playing is good" (Hurka 2014, p. xiii) via his utopian vision at the conclusion of *The Grasshopper*.

1.4 Objections to Suits

As noted, the neatness of Suits' definition has not been met with universal approbation, and has been the object of several axes of critique. Let us discuss the most pressing of these issues for Suits' thesis, and see if they can be ironed out, beginning with the criticism that Suits' definition of 'game' is overly-inclusive.

Although Suits does not shackle his definition to ordinary language usage, he does concede that “usage must not be ignored in definitional inquiry” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 97). To ignore ordinary language usage completely would result in philosophical “Humpty-Dumptyism” wherein terms mean solely what we stipulate them to be, to the detriment of both usage and common sense more generally (Suits 1977, pp. 118-119). Indeed, this Humpty-Dumptyism is what Wittgenstein takes aim at when he describes “the bewitchment of our intelligence by means of language” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §109). This objection makes it reasonable to reject Suits’ definition if any questionable set inclusion it ostensibly justifies *strongly* challenges our intuitions on what constitutes a game.

Frank McBride objects that Suits’ definition is too *inclusive* because mountain-climbing, for instance—which is not generally thought of as a game—fits within Suits’ definition (McBride 1979, pp. 62-63). Suits can, however, convincingly defend this inclusion because the activity implicitly demonstrates a “limitation in principle” on lusory means—the dedicated mountain-climber *climbs mountains*, after all, and would refuse to use escalators or helicopters to reach mountain peaks; thus the inefficiency principle is respected in the implicit constitutive rules of mountain-climbing (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 90-92). By contrast, activities exhibiting *no* limitations on means, such as unregulated duels to the death, *cannot* count as Suitsian games because they are essentially

instrumental activities that seek to achieve their goals as efficiently as possible (Suits 2014 [1978], Chapter 6).

Perhaps more troublingly, John Tasioulas has submitted that activities such as “the justified punishment of offenders” and prosecuting “a war... in accordance with humanitarian law” could count as games for Suits; and that each of these rule-governed activities would clearly constitute an undesirable set inclusion (Tasioulas 2006, p. 238). This is because punishment could be more efficiently meted out if the legal system did not require a justificatory process for its dispensation of penalties, and wars could be concluded more swiftly if such “potentially efficient means as the torture of enemy soldiers and the terror bombing of civilians” were employed; thus these activities satisfy the inefficiency principle (Tasioulas 2006, p. 238). But such inclusions, while in violation of ordinary language usage, may not internally trouble Suits’ account overmuch. Suits does not explicitly state in his definition that prelusory goals need to be trivial, and in fact is very succinct that any “*specific achievable state of affairs*” would qualify as a valid goal (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 38). Moreover, since “a readiness to lose the race rather than kill a child is not what makes the race a game; it is the refusal to, *inter alia*, cut across the infield in order to get ahead of the other contestants” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 31), it is clear that the *stakes* of Suitsian games can remain conceptually unrestricted in a manner that their lusory means cannot. The violence done here to ordinary language usage is noted, and it

is a pill that Suits may have to swallow, perhaps in exchange for the goods of illuminating new perspectives on war and justice. But more damaging than this is the violence done to the internal logic of Suits' position by Suits himself in a later piece, wherein he claims that "the trivializing of their goals is an essential element of games" (Suits 1982, p. 759), in direct contradiction to his earlier definition. However, since our interest in this section is the objections raised by Suits' critics, and not instances of Suits' self-sabotage, I merely raise the point here for future Suits scholars to investigate, and move on.

Finally, Scott Kretchmar observes that according to Suits' definition, "*anyone* who intentionally pursues a goal under artificial constraints may be participating in a game" (Kretchmar 2008, p. 144), which "allows him to suggest that we are all grasshoppers in disguise and that we may have unwittingly turned our workday lives, or at least parts of them, into games" (Kretchmar 2008, p. 145). Kretchmar's specific concern of over-inclusivity ties into the theme of an early paper of Suits', which outlines the possibility that all of "life is an unconscious game" (Suits 1967a, p. 209) and "all moral rules are game rules in disguise" (Suits 1967a, p. 211). Suits returns to this theme in his 'recurring dream' at the beginning of *The Grasshopper*, wherein he muses: "Is the carpenter on his roof-top simply hammering nails, or is he making some move in an ancient game

whose rules he has forgotten?” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 12)¹⁹ For Suits, the possibility of unconscious gameplay “removes the chief obstacle to taking seriously the possibility that life is a game in which all of us are players” (Suits 1970, p. 138) and opens up the possibility of a utopia wherein “although all of the apparently productive activities of man were games, they were not believed to be games” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 195). Thus the apparent defect that Kretchmar picks up on here is actually a necessary feature of Suits’ definition, if it is meant—as I believe it is—to serve as the grounding for his *utopian thesis*: the idea that a life consisting entirely of gameplay is “*the ideal of existence*” for humankind (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182).

On the other hand, Kretchmar also criticizes Suits’ definition of ‘game’ for being overly-*exclusive*: not for excluding unregulated duels to the death, but because “he clearly opposed the inclusion of performance. He ignored games of chance. He said nothing about ambiguous games and the process of gaming up antecedently existing activities” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 153). It is true that Suits excludes Ring Around the Rosie, which is often thought of as a performative children’s game, from the set of activities corresponding to his definition of ‘game’. He does, however, *include* children’s ‘make-believe’ *role-governed*

¹⁹ Suits repeatedly entertains the logical possibility that “everyone alive is in fact engaged in playing elaborate games, while at the same time believing themselves to be going about their ordinary affairs... Whatever occupation or activity you can think of, it is in reality a game” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 11).

activities like Cops and Robbers in his set of games, which are also performative but do not have a fixed or scripted ending to them—because a rudimentary prelusory goal can be identified in their participants’ trying to occupy dramatic roles as fully as they can, for as long as they desire (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 96-99). So the exclusion of Ring Around the Rosie from the set of games appears to be convincingly defensible, on the grounds that it lacks a proper prelusory goal and has a fixed sequence of moves, which makes it more akin to a balletic or musical performance than a game. As for what Suits ignored—although omission seems to be a less compelling axis of criticism than an explicit and problematic set exclusion—it could be claimed, *contra* Kretchmar, that ‘gaming up antecedingly existing activities’ is *exactly* what Suits’ utopians spend much of their existences doing. Since a defence of Suits, or at least an explanation of the full implications of his definition of ‘game’, hinges on a discussion of his utopian thesis, let us turn now to Suits’ definition of ‘utopia’.

1.5 Suits versus Davis on the Definition of ‘Utopia’

As noted, Suits’ most influential publication, *The Grasshopper*, “does two things... advances a definition of games and... argues that the ideal of human existence—that is, Utopia—must consist fundamentally, if not exclusively, in the playing of games” (Suits 1984b, p. 8). The first of these two targets, Suits’

conceptually tight definition of ‘game’, has been rightly lauded in philosophical circles. The second aim, his attempt to articulate his utopian thesis that a life of gameplay is the ideal of human existence, has been met with significantly less enthusiasm. This may be partly because his utopian vision—stipulated as a post-instrumental condition wherein “all of the things ordinarily called work are now done by wholly automated machines which are activated solely by mental telepathy” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182), “all possible interpersonal problems have been solved by appropriate methods” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183), utopians “have acquired all the knowledge there is” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 186), “there is no need for government” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 184), “no evil can befall anyone” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185), “art would not exist” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 184), and wherein gameplay would constitute “the only remaining candidate for Utopian occupation” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 188)—is comparatively ambitious, and less well defended. Moreover, the description of Suits’ utopia runs against the grain of better established pre-existing definitions in the field of utopian studies, such as that proposed by J.C. Davis.

Davis, by contrast to Suits, holds that ‘Utopia’²⁰ is a sober installation of new state apparatuses, and the restructuring of old ones, to accomplish the best

²⁰ In most instances in this text, I use a lower case ‘u’ in ‘utopia’ to refer to the generic concept of an ideal socio-political order. However, here I have used a capital ‘U’ for ‘Utopia’ since it picks out the definite strand of ideal society that Davis typologizes. In most of Suits’ work, he (incorrectly, by my reckoning) uses a capital ‘U’ for what ought to be a lower case ‘utopia’, despite the fact that his utopia is not a state, a place, or a nation (and thus not a proper noun), but a rather

life possible in this world for its citizens, while retaining our familiar laws of physics, and built in line with established psychological and sociological facts and principles (Davis 2003 [1981], pp. 36-40). Davis' definition of Utopia, as an ideal society "which accepts deficiencies in men and nature and strives to constrain and condition them through organizational controls and sanctions" (Davis 2003 [1981], p. 370) simply does not fit with Suits' descriptions of psychologically perfected utopians and a mysteriously materially superabundant universe. Thus, if Davis' conceptual distinction is considered authoritative, then Suits' use of terminology not only constitutes a deviation from ordinary language usage, but is also inapt and misleading.

A potential way to diffuse this definitional conflict would be to claim that Suits is not describing a Utopia in the usual sense, but another form of ideal society typologized by Davis: the 'Cockayne'. According to Davis, a Cockayne is a type of ideal society characterized chiefly by a supernatural abundance of material goods: rivers of whiskey, cooked geese flying into desirous mouths, self-roasting pigs, gumdrops growing on trees, and so forth (Davis 2003 [1981], pp. 20-22). Suits seems comfortable with his conflation, as he explicitly blurs the line between the Cockayne tradition and his utopia in the following passage: "The

amorphous idea that his characters continually refine and revise via their dialogue. In a parenthetical comment contained in a later unpublished writing, Suits displays cognizance of this typographical-conceptual error and takes pains to correct it: "It was suggested to me by the Grasshopper that if our conversation were put into print, then it would be appropriate to render the word utopia with a lower case 'u', until Utopia had been identified" (Suits 19--c, p. 18).

Grasshopper's inquiry into Utopia may be regarded as an updating of 'The Land of Cockayne'" (Suits 19--c, pp. 3-4). However, contrary to the Cockaygnian tradition, Suits attempts to ground his utopia in physical reality by asserting that: "All Cockayne lacks is the silicon chip. But we have the chip, and so while Cockayne may have been a charming joke to its contemporary audience, it need not be merely that for us" (Suits 1984a, p. 197). Thus, in line with Suits' own reasoning, his 'utopia' is better described as a *techno-Cockayne*, a Cockayne enabled by as-yet-unknown technological advances—rather than by a wholesale *supernatural* reorganization of the principles of physics.

Suits implicitly acknowledges the terminological issue that Davis' position poses for him, couched in his complaint that: "For some writers... Cockayne is too utopian to qualify as a genuine utopia, on the ground that its author has given no indication whatever as to how such avian and porcine altruism can be brought about" (Suits 1984a, p. 197). Suits apparently does not concern himself with the presentation of a rationally compelling utopian vision, a *blueprint utopia* that demonstrates the viability of utopian life, nor is he necessarily interested in its function as a regulative political ideal.²¹ Instead, he insists that "the Utopia I

²¹ Elsewhere, Suits coins the terms 'utoponous' and 'utopotech' to indicate two different types of utopian thinkers. *Utoponous* thinkers engage, broadly, in "conceptual analysis or speculation" using utopias as thought-experimental tools, while *utopotech* thinkers regard utopias in terms of "blueprints for social change, or at least as being importantly relevant to such blueprints" (Suits 19--d, p. 5). Suits places himself in the utoponous camp, but that in itself does not shackle him to any specific commitments to the contents of any given utopia—only the manner in which he intends to employ the source material of utopias more generally.

envisage is not a state of affairs that is ideally *desirable*; it is simply a state of affairs that is logically *inevitable*" (Suits 1984b, p. 15).²² If Suits were presenting a blueprint utopia, then he would be prudent to provide some sort of rationale or programme for explaining to readers how to get from the world of today to the utopia of tomorrow²³—but he claims that he is not, and on that basis considers himself entitled to dismiss Davis' typology.

Suits, however, needlessly contradicts himself here. For he also calls his utopia "*the ideal of existence*" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182) which must, *ipso facto*, be normatively desirable. Simply placing utopia as a conceptual endpoint for the termination of all instrumental activities²⁴ is something entirely separate from—and *not* something that necessarily stands in logical opposition to—its status as an ideal for humankind. He could have had 'utopia' imply both things, but instead seemingly chose to abandon the value-laden sense of the term for the merely stipulative one. Nevertheless, given that he writes elsewhere about the role of

²² Suits describes his utopia as 'logically inevitable' because the goal of all work is its own extinction and, given infinite time, all work will be completed (Suits 1984b, p. 19). What is left at the end of that hypothetical historical process is, by his definition, only games.

²³ If the concept of utopia is to be used as a blueprint or regulative ideal in the present, then utopia must be believed to be possible to obtain; for one cannot rationally subscribe to a political schema that one believes cannot be achieved. An impossible political schema cannot be action-guiding, unless it one mistakenly believes it to be possible.

²⁴ Suits refers to this state as "the end of history itself, and with it the end of the future" (Suits 19--c, p. 117).

games in a 'leisure ethic'²⁵ as being the justification for work (Suits 2007 [1973], pp. 13-14) and the key to realizing human capacities which could not be elicited via other means (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12), I think it safe to conclude that the more interesting and consistent way to read Suits is to affirm that gameplay *is* normatively charged on his account, despite his inconsistent protests to the contrary.

Suits explicitly criticizes Davis on the basis that "his characterization of utopia appears to... differ very little, if at all, from the characterization of any reasonably well-conducted political society" (Suits 1988b, p. 269). In other words, if Suits' utopia is *too fanciful* for Davis, then by the same token Davis' Utopia is *too plain* for Suits. I find this objection unconvincing however, for Davis sufficiently distinguishes his concept of Utopia from extant reasonably well-conducted political societies when he writes that "these three—totality, order, perfection—are cardinal characteristics of the utopian form" (Davis 2003 [1981], p. 38) and that "almost by definition, then, the perfection of utopias must be total and ordered; the totality, ordered and perfect" (Davis 2003 [1981], p. 39). Thus, if a totalized, ordered condition of perfection can be considered different

²⁵ This is contrasted with the so-called 'work ethic'. Traditionally, work was viewed as an important moral corrective, because—by the dim lights of the doctrine of original sin—freedom from toil is freedom to do mischief. A world without work would, therefore, necessarily lead to moral degeneracy. From such a perspective, games of all kinds can be viewed with suspicion and derision, as a profligate indulgence; even under conditions of enforced idleness, such as those in Suits' utopian vision.

and better than the political *status quo*—and of course it can—then Suits cannot fairly take issue with Davis on grounds of an infelicitous usage of terminology.

Moreover, Suits proposes an alternate definition of ‘utopia’ which is vague to the point that it would wholly contain Davis’ conception within it: *a good place that does not exist* (Suits 1988b, p. 270). He distinguishes this definition of ‘utopia’ in logical contrast to *eutopia*, a good place that does exist; *dystopia*, a bad place that does exist; and *dysutopia*, a bad place that does not exist (Suits 1988b, p. 270). More formally, Suits writes elsewhere that “some *x* can properly be called a Utopia if and only if it depicts or proposes (or in general has to do with) a condition of man different from and better than the condition of man which obtains, or is thought to obtain, at the time of the Utopian thinker’s depicting or proposing it”²⁶ (Suits 19--d, p. 1). Both Suits’ simple and formal definitions are very broad, inclusive to a fault, and—unelaborated and undefended—lack the nuanced distinctions of Davis’ typology of ideal societies.

²⁶ Immediately preceding this passage, Suits writes that “a philosopher more influenced by Wittgenstein than I have been (which is scarcely at all) would very likely begin from the position that the various uses to which the term Utopia have been put... do not conform to one meaning, but at most, perhaps, bear what Wittgenstein calls family resemblances to one another. I submit that things are not that bad” (Suits 19--d, p. 1). I must confess that I cringed in recognition when I read this. For just as McGinn admits to being a lapsed and disillusioned former disciple of Wittgenstein (McGinn 2012, Chapter 2, notes 8, 9, 19), I too must own up to my own moment of doubt and pain. Despairing of the disarrayed conceptual state of affairs in the field of utopian studies, I too once surrendered the quest for a definition of ‘utopia’ and drank from the bitter cup of family resemblances (Yorke 2007, p. 98). It is of some consolation that this bit of intellectual cowardice occurred at the terminus of a fruitless line of analytic inquiry, rather than at its outset.

Thus I am inclined to conclude that Davis gets the better of Suits on the definitional front. However, Suits' utopia can avoid conflicting with Davis' typology by adopting my suggested nomenclature of the 'techno-Cockayne'. Suits' use of 'utopia' is a case wherein a vague use of a term must give way for a more technically precise use of that term—given by Davis' definition—much in the same manner that Suits argues that his definition of 'game' trumps ordinary language usage of the word in terms of its conceptual precision (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 199). Thus whenever the term 'utopia' appears subsequently in this text as shorthand with reference to Suits' work, the techno-Cockayne will be specifically what is meant. Nevertheless, given Suits' comprehensive description of his techno-Cockayne as a conceptual space, he draws some surprisingly non-ideal conclusions on its bases. Keeping that description in mind, the subsequent chapters will constitute an examination of the logical consequences of the particulars of Suits' utopian vision.

1.6 Suits' Utopia of Totalized Gameplay

First, however, we must address a potential contradiction between Suits' concepts of 'game' and 'utopia' that he does not fully explore: the implicit requirement that both can be entered into, and exited from, *on one's own volition*. After all, first and foremost, play is a *voluntary* activity. As Johan

Huizinga writes, “play to order is no longer play: it could at best be but a forcible imitation of it” (Huizinga 1955 [1938], p. 7). Suits conspicuously builds this volitional requirement into his definition of games, but does not acknowledge the violation of that volitional requirement when games are totalized, which is to say when they are made to constitute the entirety of a human life—as they would in his vision of utopia. Troublingly, entry into a totalized life of gameplay, which would perdure throughout one’s existence, would be *non-voluntary* for Suits’ utopians: they would be born into it. Thus, games in his utopia would constitute *non-voluntary attempts to overcome necessary obstacles*. That is, utopian games would be, paradoxically, *anti-games* or *work* by Suits’ definition.

Instead of recognizing and addressing the inherent contradictions of a non-voluntary utopia of gaming, Suits claims to the contrary that “Utopia is intelligible, and... game playing is what makes Utopia intelligible” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 188). But portraying utopia as a totalized network of interlocking games, in addition to running counter to Suits’ definitional project, poses a separate logical difficulty for his hypothetical utopians as well. For utopia would cease to be utopia if its citizens could not elect to leave; if there was no option for defection (contrariwise: if *all* utopians left utopia, it would also cease to be utopia). Utopian citizens cannot be *prisoners* of their utopias if they are, indeed, utopias. As it happens, no well-balanced utopian citizen *would* leave a true utopia, but not because it was prohibited by law, or contingently impossible.

Utopians would stay in their utopias simply because egress would be rationally non-maximizing: for if one lives in the perfect state, it does not behoove one to take flight. But in Suits' utopian vision, there is nowhere to fly *to*: for utopia is everywhere; and everywhere, games are being played.

To address this potential contradiction in his definitions, Suits must give his utopians an 'out'. Happily, he accomplishes this in a passage wherein he states that his utopians can will themselves free of the use of their telepathically-controlled supercomputers that—when used—make instrumental activity impossible (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 195). This means that egress from his utopia is possible, and that there *is* another type of activity than gameplay available to post-utopians who desire to leave their Edenic condition of life in the techno-Cockayne—namely, work. Thus, the totalization of gameplay in Suits' utopia is not as totalized as it first appears, and we can consider the volitional requirements of both gameplay and utopian citizenship to be conceptually satisfied.

1.7 Summary

Wittgenstein's family resemblance thesis fails to capture what a 'game' is in many ways. It is overly-inclusive in that there is no clear mechanism for sorting out surface resemblances from deep resemblances; it accepts the necessity of

conceptual vagueness regarding ‘game’ without testing that premise; and it creates a false dichotomy between theorizing and seeing, not recognizing these as two parts in a larger process of conceptual creation and refinement. By comparison, Suits’ moderate definitionist effort to define ‘gameplay’ neatly captures the essential elements of the activity in a largely unobjectionable fashion, and constitutes a contribution to philosophy in that it successfully refutes Wittgenstein’s antiphilosophical thesis.

Many objections raised by Suits’ critics can either be directly answered, or explained by reference to his utopian thesis. While Suits’ later efforts to define ‘utopia’ are less convincing, and run afoul of more conceptually precise accounts of the term such as J.C. Davis’, he can sidestep this conceptual conflict by defining his utopian vision as a *techno-Cockayne*. Suit’ utopia of totalized gameplay thus does not constitute a contradiction of terms upon closer examination. However, there are a host of other philosophical issues raised by contemplating Suits’ utopian thesis—including whether the lives of his utopians would represent the ideal of existence, or whether they would go mad from boredom; whether his utopians are capable of being virtuous, or whether they would be behaviourally conditioned to the point of having no free will; and whether or not we can hope to understand what utopian games are from our pre-utopian perspective—which we will now turn to consider in the subsequent chapters.

Chapter 2: ‘Wholly Automated Machines’: Suits, Nozick, and Utopia

Let us imagine, then, that all of the instrumental activities of human beings have been eliminated. All of the things ordinarily called work are now done by wholly automated machines which are activated solely by mental telepathy... (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182)

Bernard Suits' vision of utopia in his *The Grasshopper: Games, Life and Utopia* is that of a perfectly peaceful society wherein all the socio-political problems of our world have been fruitfully solved by technological advances. It is a society of material superabundance, serviced by telepathically-controlled automata: a techno-Cockayne (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183). Admittedly, Suits' utopian vision is but one instantiation of many possible good worlds: but he claims that in such a post-instrumental society, intrinsically enjoyable activities will of necessity be valued above all else, with *games* constituting the ultimate unifying category of these activities (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 188). Games are to occupy the waking hours of his utopians, who otherwise would have nothing useful or diverting to do, and eventually become malcontent or suicidal (Suits 1984b, p. 8). Thus, according to Suits—who holds that “a game Utopia is a logical inevitability” (Suits 1984b, p. 19)—one of our present pragmatic duties is to invent marvellous entertainments in preparation for the future, so that his utopians will not face an existential crisis once utopian conditions obtain (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). Good games are seen to be a means of preserving utopia, if not a means for establishing it.

In this context I interrogate Robert Nozick's famous thought experiment, the experience machine—and its lesser-known cousins, the result machine and the transformation machine—as they all have their functional correlates in Suits' utopian vision. My goal in this chapter is not necessarily to further Nozick scholarship, but to use his thought-experimental machinery as analogues to help us understand the form of life of Suitsian utopians from a novel angle. For any philosophical objections which would apply to using Nozick's machines—i.e., 'we want to do certain things', 'we want to be certain kinds of people', and 'using the machine would limit us to a man-made reality'—apply equally to both the use of the supercomputers which facilitate Suit's utopia, the techno-Cockayne, and also the use of fully immersive games themselves.

In this chapter, I argue that the standard epistemological and metaphysical reasons given for non-usage of Nozick's machines can be satisfactorily refuted, and thus life in Suits' utopia is analogously defensible. However, I conclude with a dilemma. For if my defence of utopian life in the techno-Cockayne is unconvincing, then Suits' utopia is deeply problematic on the standard Nozickian account; and if my defence is convincing, then there are still two additional problematics which remain to be answered, requiring separate treatments: lack of moral agency, and existential boredom in utopia.

2.1: Suits' Techno-Cockayne as Nozickian Result Machine

Suits' telepathically-controlled "wholly automated machines" are the under-described technological enablers of his modern-day version of the mythological Land of Cockayne, serving as a prop to get his utopian thought experiment off the ground (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182). From what little can be gleaned from Suits' description, these machines appear to be the logical correlates of a Nozickian *result machine*, "which produces in the world any result you would produce and injects your vector input into any joint activity" (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 44). This reading is consistent, for example, with Suits' claims that in utopia "all of the economic problems of man have been solved forever" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183) and that "with no competing claims for goods requiring legislation and adjudication, there is no need for government" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 184). These machines are strictly better technological upgrades on the wish-granting genies of fairy tale lore, because they can grant endless wishes to unlimited numbers of wishers (they are not arbitrarily restricted to *three* wishes per user), and they admit of no possibility of having the users' desires be misunderstood: wishes becomes world states instantly, without the possibility of a mischievous djinn intervening between word and deed and causing an undesired world state to obtain due to ambiguous terminology employed by the wisher, a too-literal interpretation of semantics, or errors in their use of syntax.

Nozick claims that we would not use his result machine, on the grounds that it would live out our lives *for us*—a result he finds undesirable (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 44). Still, in non-utopian circumstances the mere existence of such a technological wonder would mean that possessing it would create some moral duties for its users. By this I mean that Nozick would need to have a very good—irrefutable, really—reason why someone who owns a result machine should not immediately push a button and bring about a world state in which all forms of cancer are cured, for a start. The objection that the machine would be “living our lives for us” does not do the job of providing moral grounds for non-usage in this and similar cases, since there is no relevant sense in which we could be living out our own lives, and still bring about the desired (and morally desirable) result.

Indeed, Nozick’s assertion that using the result machine would mean that we are not living our own lives must stand on something like the belief that there is something irreplaceably valuable about difficulty, effort, and engagement with processes. But *all* well-designed machines less dramatically—but still noticeably—reduce difficulty, mitigate effort, and help minimize the level of engagement required of us in the process of achieving our goals. We cannot consistently condemn use of just the result machine, and exempt other machines from a parallel axis of critique, except by dint of the result machine’s *complete* efficiency. If the problematic is read as drawing its force from the machine’s mere reduction of human effort *tout court*, then Nozick’s position could oddly imply

that it is less authentic to mend a tear in your pants using a sewing machine, than with a needle and thread; and that an airplane is ‘living my life for me’ when it takes me from Airport A to Airport B more quickly than I could move unaided, which is highly implausible. Thus, we must conclude that Nozick is *not* taking aim at merely *partially* efficient machinery. A similar concern to Nozick’s apparent worry about *completely* efficient machinery is raised by Suits with regard to life in his utopia—that death or madness by boredom is a likely outcome for utopians who are confronted with the perpetual conundrum of having *nothing at all* that needs doing; living lives fully bereft of effort due to the wish-granting technology of their telepathically-controlled supercomputers (Suits 1984b, p. 8).

Use of a completely efficient result machine could also be objected to on alternate consequentialist grounds. For bad people want bad things to happen quite often, and even the more morally restrained among us might wish for wicked world state to come about, if we were sufficiently provoked. More mundanely, consider a petulant child’s ill-considered cry of “I wish you were dead!” to a well-meaning but desire-frustrating parent. Hooked up to a result machine, the teenager would make the parent’s death obtain with one errant thought-command. This possibility stands in stark contradiction to Suits’ assertion that “in Utopia no evil or wrong can befall anyone” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). Unrestricted result machine usage by a number of psychologically fallible or morally corrupt individuals would inevitably produce a *dystopia*, wherein at least

some people would wage a perpetual war of all against all with unfailingly lethal machine-generated weaponry—as opposed to a *utopia*, wherein such scenarios are seemingly ruled out by definition. Indeed, result machine usage put to genocidal ends could even devolve into what Nick Bostrom has called an ‘existential risk’, a risk that “threatens the premature extinction of Earth-originating intelligent life or the permanent and drastic destruction of its potential for desirable future development” (Bostrom 2013, p. 15). Thus, the under-described “quite new development in socio- or psychotherapy or in pharmacology” Suits posits, which results in “one hundred percent cures for all psychic disturbances” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183), must *predate* the invention of his result machine analogues, and therefore the onset of the post-instrumental utopian condition they enable—or else this ‘utopia’ would be rapidly destroyed by its own completely effective wicked-wish-fulfilling technology.

2.2: The Transformation Machine and the Need for Morally Perfect Utopians

The transformation machine Nozick outlines can instantaneously change its users into any kind of person they want to be, at the touch of a button (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 44). It is trivial for Nozick, but important for Suits, to note that a transformation machine can be wished for by a result machine and thereby come

into existence in his thought-experimental scenario.²⁷ Alternately, if one's psychological and physiological composition counts as a 'result' in the world, one could forego the superfluous machinery and alter oneself directly through result machine usage.

In any case, use of a transformation machine looks like it could put us on the fast track toward producing a perfect moral commonwealth—all we would need to do would be to enter it and to wish to become infallibly morally good, and we would become such.²⁸ As a finesse on this, and ignoring the unsavouriness of the methodology, imagine that anyone unwilling to use the transformation machine for the purpose of becoming infallibly good was coerced to do so (it matters not whether this coercion is put into effect by state or non-state actors). This would make evil as impossible for *anyone* to do as it is for Suits' utopians (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185), and so unrestricted result machine usage would then be safe to generally permit without horrific consequences obtaining. Although using a result machine is the most obvious route for producing a transformation machine, the result machine cannot be safely employed without *first* using the transformation machine, which forecloses that alternative. Thus, moral indoctrination in combination with pharmaceutical bioenhancement—

²⁷ See Chapter 7 for a discussion of how unrestricted transmogrification of the human body would vitiate the possibility of utopian sport.

²⁸ The question of whether automatic or conditioned virtue counts as a coherent concept or a contradiction in terms is taken up in earnest in Chapter 3.

which together can effect a very convincing imitation of a transformation machine in terms of producing reliably good human behaviour (Persson and Savulescu 2012)—will have to do instead.

This kind of ‘moral doping’ could be what Suits has in mind when he states that by the time his utopia arrives “all possible interpersonal problems have been solved by appropriate methods... some quite new development in socio- or psychotherapy has made it possible to effect one hundred per cent cures for all psychic disturbances” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183). By these mysterious methods, Suits’ utopians are made completely neuroses-free, and with neither material nor psychological motivation for doing evil remaining, they would have no occasion for making harmful use of their telepathically-controlled supercomputers. Under such conditions the result machine would exceptionally escape what Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu call the ‘dual use problem’, that technology “can be put to both beneficial and harmful uses” (Persson and Savulescu 2012, p. 124): for there would be only beneficial usage of the result machine left as a live possibility.

2.3: Are Suits’ Utopian Games Nozickian Experience Machines?

Nozick’s ‘experience machine’ is yet another a thought experimental construct, designed by fictional “superduper neuropsychologists” (Nozick 2013

[1974], p. 42) to allow its patrons to have any experience they desire. The procedure for usage is simple: the user programs the set of experiences they wish to have into the machine, enters it, and has electrodes attached to their brain which realistically simulate that set of experiences as actually occurring in the mind of the user. The user is finally released after two years of experiencing their choices, and is then free to program their next two-year stint in the machine (Nozick 2013 [1974], pp. 42-43). However, this would occur at the cost of the user sentencing themselves to a prison of sorts within the experience machine, wherein their contact with reality, their effect on the world, and arguably their existence as a person (though not as an experiencing entity) would be nullified for the duration of their usage. This is because even though “while you’re in the tank you won’t know that you’re there; you’ll think it’s all actually happening” (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43), in reality “all the time you would be floating in a tank, with electrodes attached to your brain” (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 42).

By pumping our intuitions that we would not use such an experience machine, Nozick hopes to demonstrate that there are more valuable activities than merely experiencing pleasure which, upon due reflection, demand our philosophical allegiance (Nozick 2013 [1974], pp. 42-45). This concern is mirrored in Suits’ utopia as an existential anxiety about the low overall perceived value of a life consisting entirely of contentedly playing games compared with the relatively high perceived value of overcoming ‘real’ obstacles. (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 195-

196). The worry that “life for most people will not be worth living if they cannot believe that they are doing *something* useful” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 196) necessitates a kind of utopian self-delusion akin to the kind experienced by Nozick’s experience machine users, in that they must bring themselves to believe that their utopian games are “not games at all, but vitally necessary tasks which had to be performed in order for human survival” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 195). This self-delusion necessitated by existential angst, however, results in Suits’ utopians banning the use of their telepathically-controlled wish-granting supercomputers, and thereby bringing about “the downfall of Utopia” (Suits 2014 [1978], 195).

For Nozick, “plugging into the machine is a kind of suicide” (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43), just as for Suits’ utopians, exclusively plugging into a series of games (in the knowledge that they *are* games) provokes a utopia-wide existential crisis leading to their “vanishing on the spot”, for “they would have felt that their whole lives had been as nothing—a mere stage play or empty dream” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 196). The dilemma for Suits is seemingly no longer between utopian gameplay and utopian suicide, but between utopian suicide provoked by boredom at the very onset of utopia (U_1) and utopian suicide provoked by disillusionment a reasonable amount of time after its establishment (U_2). No doubt these extreme formulations rest on the fact that these two thought experiments present us with parallel logical extremes: human lives reduced to a series of illusive or delusive experiences with no productive outcome, interrupted

only by brief interstices of self-awareness between continuous diversions. The main reasons Nozick gives that we would not, as a rule, voluntarily use the experience machine—nor, by extension, Suitsian utopian games—are the following: (1) “we want to *do* certain things”, (2) “we want to *be* a certain way”, and (3) “plugging into the experience machine limits us to a man-made reality, to a world no deeper or more important than that which people can construct” (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43). Let us now examine whether Nozick’s presumption that the default human preference would be for non-usage of experience machines is justified, before considering the implications of his position for Suits’ utopian thesis.

2.4: Refuting Nozickian Justifications for Non-Usage of Experience Machines

Nozick’s first reason that we would not voluntarily use an experience machine, that we want to do certain things in the world, seems to unfairly privilege achievements that result in *products* over achievements that result from *processes*. As Thomas Hurka notes:

Many philosophers have assumed, with Aristotle, that the value of a process aimed at producing some end-state must derive entirely from the end-state’s value, so if the latter is negligible so is the former. But there is no reason to believe this. Even if some of the process’s intrinsic value depends on its instrumental value... there can also be intrinsic value in its properties just as a process and apart from any value in its product (Hurka 2006, p. 234).

The only difference between person A, who seeks to bring about certain worldly states for the sake of having an experience (say, assembling a kit car for amusement), and person B, who employs an experience machine to acquire that experience directly (to have A's experience of building a kit car for amusement), is that A has a product at the end of their process, whilst B does not: their experience of the process is identical. In a world where product is rendered trivial—e.g., Suits' materially superabundant techno-Cockayne (where anyone can simply wish for a kit car and immediately have one)—it is difficult to preserve Nozick's intuition that machine usage is *a priori* undesirable simply on the basis of its being unproductive.

The second reason that Nozick gives for assuming we would not want to use an experience machine hinges on the fact that, while in the experience machine, a person cannot *be* any certain way they want to be. Nozick offers the example that an individual cannot be "courageous, kind, intelligent, witty, loving" (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43) while in the machine, because she cannot actively display these traits at that time. No private (or latent) qualities appear to be taken into consideration here. Thus, 'being a certain kind of person' is functionally equivalent to 'doing certain things', and the second reason for non-usage is thereby made redundant (that is to say, it becomes a reformulation of the first reason, which urged us to stay out of the machine in order that we might make certain states obtain in the world).

The last main reason given for presuming our preference for non-usage, that "plugging into an experience machine limits us to a man-made reality" (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43) invokes a kind of separation anxiety, a concern that experience machine usage would separate humans from a 'deeper reality'. Nozick claims that, all things considered, "we want to be importantly connected to reality, not to live in a delusion" (Nozick 1989, p. 106), and this is no doubt the case for many people. He fails, however, to adequately address the fact that reality is unkind to a good many other people, who might not value this connection to reality as much, if at all. While we all generally *want* to do certain things and be certain ways, the odds of us *actually* doing those things and being those ways are rather poor, at least for many of us (relative, of course, to the extravagance of our desires). Nozick is clearly not playing to this part of the crowd; but the bleaker the prospects for human life on this planet become, economically, politically, and environmentally, the more people that will predictably have this pessimistic attitude toward reality, and the more strongly escapist urges will (rightly or wrongly) hold sway over the intuitions which Nozick intends to evoke with his experience machine thought experiment. On the other hand, neither can Nozick's appeal to a connection with a deeper reality motivate Suitsian utopians, for whom no constraints on life prospects apply; for there is *no* deeper reality for them to connect to—their reality is solely mediated via, and made radically pliant by, their telepathically-controlled supercomputers. So all

utopians, and a continuously growing number of pre-utopians, might reasonably share the intuition that experience machine usage is acceptable or even desirable.

2.5: Utopian Applications of Experience Machine Usage *qua* Gameplay

If experience machine usage were to become socially acceptable (or, more dramatically, socially expected), eventually many would find it impossible to resist the use of that technology, just as we have historically found it impossible to resist the use of personal computers, cellular phones, and remote-controlled televisions, once they became ubiquitous. Indeed, as Alex Barber quips, “we all already own and enjoy using something like an experience machine on a daily basis: our beds” (Barber 2011, p. 267). The host of less efficient experience machines currently at our disposal, such as games, books, and recorded entertainments, have long been regarded as an acceptable surrogate for social interaction (if not regarded as comprising a form of indirect social interaction in themselves). In a certain mood, books are preferable to the company of other persons, and from a certain perspective, temporary experience machine usage could be seen as being analogous to reading a very long book or playing a very long game of solitaire.

The success of books and games in generating human happiness implies that we can have at least a rudimentary sympathetic understanding of each others' experiential lives. This is an intuitively appealing idea: through our natural empathy, we *do* seem to be capable of sharing in each other's pleasures and pains. Thus it stands to reason that a competently designed and operated experience machine would have an excellent chance of improving the overall standard of lived human experience. If we can consider books, movies, and games to be experience machines of a lesser intensity and reliability, minus the aspect of self-deception, then contrary to Nozick's intuitions on the matter, we're already using them and asking for more—for they are better tools for generating meaning than chance encounters with a fundamentally indifferent 'deeper reality'. They may even, as Martha Nussbaum suggests, count among our most reliable tools for training and refining our moral sensitivities (Nussbaum 1990).

In his later work, Nozick concurs that if used temporarily, rather than perpetually, the experience machine could be considered as a tool that "might teach you things, or transform you in a way beneficial for your actual life later. It also might give pleasures that would be quite acceptable in limited doses" (Nozick 1989, p. 108). Just as the flight simulator prepares pilots for flight, without actually sending them into the air, the experience machine could teach people how to engineer more meaningful existences for themselves without risking any undesirable consequences in the process. In this utopian mode of

operation, the machine could be used as a tool for self-discovery and self-improvement, and perhaps even cultural reform. In that sense, experience machine usage has much in common with playing the utopian games described by Suits, “games that will require for their exploitation—that is, for their mastery and enjoyment—as much energy as is expended today in serving the institutions of scarcity” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). Pleasure, development of capacities, and intellectual stimulation are all meted out in desirable portions in both cases. Indeed, a technology like the experience machine could be used as the ultimate immersive gaming platform, delivering games so impactful and realistic that “you’ll think it’s all actually happening” (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 43). Games that are thereby not experienced *qua* games, but rather as “vitally necessary tasks... for human survival” and thus *played unconsciously* by utopians, might be the key to preventing the downfall of Suits’ utopia (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 195).

2.6: Summary

Suits’ techno-Cockayne is based on the employment of thought-experimental machinery very similar in function to Nozick’s, if not identical. Therefore, any concerns convincingly raised against the use of Nozick’s machines are likely to weigh equally against Suits’ utopian vision. However, I have provided sufficient grounds for concluding that Nozick’s reasons for positing that a shared

intuition against experience machine usage exists are unconvincing. Additionally, I explored some possible utopian applications for moderate experience machine usage, and showed how experience machine usage was a natural extension of existing cultural technologies. I have also explained why transformation machine usage and result machine usage are theoretically necessitated on Suits' schema—the former because his utopian vision would self-destruct without something like it, and the latter because its use is the necessary condition for its realization. In conclusion, we can reasonably claim that Suits' utopian vision does not, ultimately, fall prey to Nozickian concerns. However, this does not preclude the possibility that Suits' work is open to other axes of criticism.

The existential concern raised at the beginning of this chapter—that Suits' utopia may collapse due to a lack of meaningful activity for his utopians—remains fundamentally unaddressed. Suits' utopia thus remains in a state of conceptual peril, but not for the reasons put forward by Nozick. To address this lacuna will require a consideration of what existential meaning is, how it can be generated, and whether gameplay could reasonably be considered to constitute meaningful activity in Suits' utopia. In addition, it seems as if the stability of utopian life in the techno-Cockayne requires something like the moral doping of all result machine users in advance of its establishment. This raises additional worries about the bare possibility of utopian virtue, which I now turn to address in the following chapter.

Chapter 3: ‘No Such Shortcomings’: Is Virtue Possible in Suits’ Utopia?

What does this ‘working at’ mean in the case of a marriage or, for that matter, any other intrinsically valued relationship between people? Does it not mean, essentially, being tolerant of, and helpful with respect to, one another’s social and psychological shortcomings? But in Utopia we are supposing that there are no such shortcomings to be tolerant of. (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 184)

Bernard Suits stipulates that his utopians are psychologically flawless (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183), and incapable of doing harm to each other (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). Moreover, “they have acquired all the knowledge there is” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 186), so they may also operate with perfect knowledge in each situation they encounter. Good in Suits’ utopia, then, is automatic: right action is known, urges to act contrary to the good are eradicated *a priori*, and so each utopian is incapable of doing evil, or even forming an evil intention. However, it might be objected that such automatic virtue is no real virtue at all. Suits himself shares this intuition: “Morality is relevant only to the extent that the ideal has not been realized, but there is no room at all for morality in the ideal itself, just as there is no room for revolution in the ideal which inspires revolutionary action” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). Thus, it appears that virtuous action might be impossible in Suits’ utopia.

Through positions I outline such as ‘the effort argument’, ‘the autonomy argument’, ‘the desire argument’, and ‘the homogeneity argument’, I consider

whether such social technologies as Platonic indoctrination, Skinnerian operant conditioning, and more contemporary innovations such as Persson and Savulescu's moral bioenhancement—as real-world analogues or precursors of Suits' utopian supercomputers—allow enough wiggle room for moral agency in his utopia, or whether they render concepts such as 'virtue' and 'character' empty therein. Either (A) some minimal scope for moral action *is possible* in Suits' utopia, and he has simply erred in claiming it was not (this is the most likely reading, since he later vacillates on this point, conceding that “perhaps morality will also be present, possibly in the form of what we now call sportsmanship”) (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194); or (B) morality *is impossible* in Suits' utopia, and his position is far less theoretically rich than it would have been otherwise. However, if (A) is indeed the case, as I argue it is, then the further problematic remains that his utopians are not only alien to us by token of the omnipotence they wield, and the omniscience they have, but also the omnibenevolence they are bound by.

3.1 Prospects for Virtue in Suits' Utopia of Gameplay

In the previous chapter, I flagged the necessity of moral perfection for Suits' utopians, as each would be entrusted with the use of telepathically-controlled, reality-warping supercomputers, the misuse of which would have horrific consequences. Nick Bostrom agrees that “it could turn out... that

attaining certain technological capabilities *before* attaining sufficient insight and coordination invariably spells doom for a civilization”, because if “some technology is discovered that puts immense destructive power into the hands of a large number of individuals, and no way to prevent individuals from having access to it, then civilization cannot last, since in a sufficiently large population there are bound to be some individuals who will use any destructive power available to them” (Bostrom 2013, p. 25). Thus, the cost of living in Suits’ techno-Cockayne—wherein technology has advanced to the point wherein any human desire can become reality with but a thought, immediately, unfailingly, and with complete efficiency—is undergoing a 100% effective programme of moral indoctrination prior to entry. The alternative would mean offering innumerable unfailing murder machines to a morally imperfect general public, with all of the predictable consequences. The question I address in this chapter is whether it is possible for Suits’ utopians to exhibit *virtue* after such a complete indoctrination.

This concern has a distinguished lineage: George Kateb writes of a “notion, as old as Plato, but easily lost sight of, that virtue is the key to the persistence of a utopian way of life, and that, in turn, the key to virtue is education in the fullest sense” (Kateb 1971, pp. 11-12). Without the proper education, in other words, virtue is not considered to be possible; and without virtue, a utopian state is considered unsustainable. However, the education

described by Plato—i.e., for his Auxiliary caste in the *Republic*—strikes the modern liberal democratic ear as rather problematic:

You should assume that the educational programme was designed for one purpose only: to indoctrinate them so thoroughly that the laws take in them like a dye, so that their notions about what is to be feared and about everything else hold fast... with the dye being incapable of being washed out by those solvents which are so frighteningly good at scouring—pleasure, which is a more efficient cleanser than any soda and lye, and pain and aversion and desire, which outclass any solvent (Plato 1950 [c. 380 B.C.E.], § 430 a-b).

All the same, Plato writes to us from antiquity, long before the establishment of modern science: his means of inculcating virtue are relatively primitive, and their small-scale application to a city-state may seem charmingly outdated. As Michael Hauskeller notes, “the availability of the means makes a huge difference in practical terms. Plato’s vision of a radically transformed society ruled by philosophers could not do much harm because he lacked the political power to make his vision real” (Hauskeller 2012, p. 45). It is only when Plato’s praise of indoctrination as a tool of social control is echoed in a context wherein political power is more efficiently extended over ever-widening territorial units, and the scientific and industrial capacities in its service are significantly increased, that we are compelled to urgently inquire into the philosophical implications of a practical realization of his programme.

While Suits' utopia is the logically extreme formulation of this technologically-enabled social reform, a more modest revitalization of Plato's program was attempted by social scientist B.F. Skinner, who was also concerned with the role of pleasure and pain in relation to the teaching of virtue (Skinner 1962). It is in the recommended *means* by which virtue is to be taught—via schemes of negative and positive reinforcement resulting in the behavioural conditioning of human beings (Skinner 1971)—that Skinner distinguished himself from Plato sufficiently to disturb the modern imagination. With Skinner's methods, moral autonomy is presumably compromised, if not altogether negated. For if consistent expressions of virtue are only made possible through behavioural conditioning, and all Skinnerian conditioning is blatant indoctrination, which precludes the possibility of free choice, then the idea of freely-chosen virtue is out of the question. Insofar as autonomy is considered crucial to the exercise of moral choice, a utopia of perfect virtue looks to be a hollow imitation of our comparatively richer actual moral and political lives.²⁹

Of course, Skinner is not alone in speculating on the possibilities suggested by the plasticity of human nature. For instance, Eugen Weber warns of the immanent "prospect of bio-control, defined as 'the control of physical movements, mental processes, emotional reactions and apparent sensory

²⁹ Therein lies the plausibility of Suits' discursive complaint that in "our non-Utopian existence... there is, quite simply, vastly more *scope for action* than there is in the Utopian world" (Suits 1984b, p. 15).

perceptions...by means of bioelectrical signals which are injected into the central nervous system of the subject” (Weber 1971, pp. 83-84). The utility of such ‘bio-control’ is frighteningly apparent, but Skinner does not endorse the application of such biotechnology, contenting himself, in Kateb’s words, “to replace the regime of fear [which maintains our current status quo] with the system of habit...to avoid association of virtue and toilsomeness... [and] to condition men so perfectly that whatever they desire is licit and whatever is required of them they do without strain” (Kateb 1963, p. 159, brackets mine). In other words, Skinner has a kinder, gentler form of social manipulation in mind than the crude electro-mechanical interventions anticipated by Weber. He saw no reason to glorify moral struggles if they were ultimately dispensable, and separable from the end of behaving virtuously:

We may mourn the passing of heroes but not the conditions which make for heroism. We can spare the self-made saint or sage as we spare the laundress on the river’s bank struggling against fearful odds to achieve cleanliness (Skinner 1971, p. 73).

In the end, Skinner confronts his readers with the following trilemma:

“Are we to be controlled by accident, by tyrants, or by ourselves in effective cultural design?” (Skinner 1971, p. 67) He believes that if we refuse to acknowledge and act on the scientific fact that human behaviour can be manipulated, then we will leave the development and application of behaviour-control techniques and technologies to unscrupulous and power-hungry tyrants, who will be all too glad to use those very same tools toward ends less noble than

the elimination of vice (Skinner 1971, p. 74). Alternately, by taking the reign of these technologies, a utopian possibility presents itself: for through their use we could transcend the caprices of brute evolutionary forces and begin to design a new future for our species (transhumanist themes are very pronounced in his work). In support of his position, Skinner submits that individuals of great merit and admirable qualities are currently produced randomly, in uncontrolled social situations. He cites the example of Abraham Lincoln, who rose from an ignominious childhood to become one of most famous presidents of the United States, the ‘Great Emancipator’ of the slaves, for arguably no better reason than the caprices of fortune—for Lincoln was not the product of an intentional cultural design, but rather had to overcome many hardships in the absence of a supportive cultural apparatus (Skinner 1971, p. 68).

For every Lincoln, believes Skinner, there are multitudes of individuals who are capable of equivalent expressions of excellence but lack the proper opportunities to develop their capacities and refine their sensitivities. He thinks that this waste in human potential can be avoided through experiments in cultural design, and especially through the development of an education system so efficient and thorough that it would be deemed indoctrination by today’s standards (indeed, the sole criterion that separates education from indoctrination for Skinner is its effectiveness). If Suits’ utopian games could serve as ‘Lincoln factories’—cultivating and realizing superlative human capacities with

unerring consistency—then Skinner would no doubt advocate their use as such. Skinner wants to improve the odds of society’s production of such virtuous individuals in the same sense that the founding of Harvard improved the odds of producing intelligent students, even at the cost of their chances of exerting effort—say, those efforts which would have been expended by having Harvard students engage in needless acts of intellectual heroism to achieve comparable levels of academic achievement at less effective institutions of higher learning.

Skinner is representative of a wider psychological movement known as *situationism*, of which there are various expressions. What Christian Miller calls a defensible version of ‘positive situationism’ is the position that “behaviour is primarily a product of situational forces... personality only has a modest causal contribution to make” (Miller 2014, p. 99), while ‘negative situationism’ is the claim that “there is a large body of experimental evidence which is incompatible with the widespread possession of folk moral virtues and vices” (Miller 2014, p. 94). According to the doctrine of positive situationism, character is largely circumscribed by environmental factors; and according to the doctrine of negative situationism, virtue is a complete myth. Both positions draw their plausibility from experimental bases, such as the studies of John Darley and John Batson, which have demonstrated that humans are generally much less prone to behave altruistically when under time pressure, and much more prone to

altruistic behaviour after receiving small unexpected rewards (Miller 2014, pp. 98-99).

Putting the issue of the validity of these experiments (and others like them) aside for the moment, let us contemplate situationism's ramifications for the possibility of virtue in utopia if they are valid. If negative situationism is factually correct, then creating a utopia of morally perfect entities is as simple as (1) identifying the correct set of situations for eliciting the desired types of 'virtuous' behaviours in individuals, (2) designing an effective formula of combinations and durations of these situations, sufficient to produce a lasting and sustainable elicitation of those behaviours, and then (3) going about their practical construction. If positive situationism is factually correct, then following the same protocol will also produce a utopia, but it will be a utopia of imperfect virtue, since the shortcomings of our personalities would still exert some resistance to the influence of the engineered situation; additional measures would be required to create unfailing virtue in this case. This brings us to consider the additional practical possibility of taking a 'morality pill' to supplement the environmental factors meant to guide the behaviour of utopian citizens.

Recently, Ingmar Persson and Julian Savulescu have suggested that we are not evolutionally well-suited for dealing with contemporary political and environmental crises, and therefore have a pressing duty to investigate the potential of species-wide pharmaceutical bioenhancement to improve our moral

capacities, for example by dosing ourselves with oxytocin to boost “trust and other pro-social behaviour towards others” (Persson and Savulescu 2012, p. 119) and inhibit reuptake of serotonin “to make subjects more fair-minded and likely to cooperate” (Persson and Savulescu 2012, p. 120). Despite their acknowledgement that current biotechnologies are less than ideally effective, and lacking concrete political recommendations for having the use of new and yet-to-be-invented drugs (and the concomitant programme of moral re-education they endorse) be adopted in a widespread fashion by the citizens of liberal democracies, they insist that this route is the most promising avenue for survival of the human species (Persson and Savulescu 2012, p. 124). If their vision were realized, and some new and completely effective morality pill were to be invented, it would be the closest real-world possible analogue to Nozick’s transformation machine, enabling an effortless reinvention in character for all who took it. However, inserting effortless and perfect morality into Suits’ utopia, in theory or in practice, seems to make it vulnerable to George Kateb’s concern that “utopianism threatens to banish from the world, together with difficulty, together with most of the tension between precept and inclination, any shred of real virtue. What merit is there in something done with ease?” (Kateb 1963, p. 173) Let us now turn to a consideration of this worry.

3.2 The Effort Argument: Effortless Virtue Is Impossible

Let us recall Nozick's 'transformation machine': the perfectly reliable thought-experimental version of a morality pill that omits any disturbing particulars involved in training humans to be good. Nozick describes the transformation machine as a machine that one could step into to become any kind of person one wanted to become, just by pushing a button (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 44). Let us say in this case that we wanted to become 'virtuous' persons, although in principle it could grant any such type of request. Nozick holds that it would not be worth our while to use his transformation machine to become virtuous, as there is something which he holds to be intrinsically valuable about *doing things for ourselves* (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 44)—when things are done for us, we lose whatever value there is in the process of exertion.

I call this line of objection the 'effort argument' against the possibility of automatic virtue. If we think of virtue as a practice, then using the transformation machine will do us no good; as without effort, there is no practice, and thus no virtue. This line draws credence from the work of Thomas Hurka, who identifies difficulty as a source of good, and loving difficulty as an additional good (Hurka 2006). Gwen Bradford refers to this additional good as the *amare bonum bonus*—"to love the good is good"—and cites Nozick as one of its chief theoretical proponents (Bradford 2015, p. 164). On these accounts, without effort there

would be no encounter with difficulty, and so effortless virtue would lack the distinctive good-making feature that difficulty provides.

Skinner can perhaps evade the effort argument, since practically speaking in the non-ideal case it could be argued that behavioural conditioning is far from an effortless process on the part of its subject, and that following the dictates of behavioural conditioning constitutes a practice of being virtuous no less than the manner in which non-behaviourally conditioned agents could be construed as practicing virtue. Suits, however, cannot evade the effort argument so easily—because he relies on his 100% efficient supercomputers to bring about a similar end. Thus, we cannot dispel the lingering, somewhat odd intuition that an inefficient, labour-intensive, and potentially painful programme of indoctrination is somehow more valuable than an effortless one.

From a certain perspective, the prospect of instantaneous moral improvement seems unobjectionable, and in the mutual interest of all. For instance, T.H. Huxley cheerily asserts that:

if some great Power would agree to make me always think what is true and do what is right, on condition of being turned into a sort of clock and wound up every morning before I got out of bed, I should instantly close with the offer. The only freedom I care about is the freedom to do right; the freedom to do wrong I am ready to part with on the cheapest terms to anyone who will take it of me (Huxley 1870, p. 373).

The freedom Huxley bargains for here is the freedom of a clockwork-being, albeit a clockwork-being of the greatest possible moral precision—it would be a form of

‘moral doping’ as effective as that promised by use of Nozick’s transformation machine, and more reliable than Persson and Savulescu’s recommended programme of pharmaceutical bioenhancement. Nevertheless, an entity such as Huxley’s clockwork-being would elude most categorizations of what it is to live a moral life. The clockwork-being simply acts—it does not choose; all its choice was expended in the act of making the original bargain that brought it into being. That ultimate choice might, in itself, count as an ‘effort’, broadly construed; although this may not completely satisfy a strong reading of the effort argument, as requiring consistent moral exertion. If we can reasonably expect that Skinnerian behavioural conditioning will be as effective as he thinks it will, then the choice to undergo behavioural conditioning will constitute such an ‘ultimate’ choice, and perhaps Skinnerian—and by proxy Suitsian—utopians *will* be in much the same position as a Huxleyan clockwork-being. The mere act of ‘choosing virtue’ might suffice to satisfy a weak reading of the effort argument, but this consideration will not be enough to satisfactorily address the next argument against the possibility of virtue in utopia: the autonomy argument.

3.3 The Autonomy Argument: Conditioned Virtue Is Impossible

- (1) Virtue is—or at least requires—the proper exercise of the faculty of moral choice.
- (2) In Suits’ utopia, virtuous behaviour is conditioned, which eliminates the possibility of exercising the faculty of moral choice *tout court*.

Therefore (3) virtue understood as the proper exercise of the faculty of moral choice is not possible in Suits' utopia.

Let us consider the argument as it stands. The first premise asks us to assign a precondition to virtue: that of moral choice. But on Rosalind Hursthouse's generally accepted neo-Aristotelian picture (Hursthouse 2001), it is not the case that this premise holds. On that account, the exercise of practical wisdom (*phronesis*) is internalized by the virtuous agent to the point that responding appropriately to the demands of a moral situation is largely an automatic process. A perfectly virtuous moral agent would not need to stop and deliberate on what to do, and in some situations it would be entirely inappropriate to do so, as that would prevent right moral action from being expressed. For example, the virtuous agent does not need to *think* before saving a drowning baby from a river, they just *see* what needs to be done to remedy the situation, and then they *do* it. Intellectual deliberation on the proper course of action, when faced with an immediate moral dilemma, is considered to be a sign of incomplete virtue—or weakness of will (*akrasia*)—in the moral agent.

To reiterate: the response of a truly virtuous agent is largely automatic, much as Skinner would like it to be. But it would be inaccurate to say that Skinner's moral indoctrination targets the *character*, as in the neo-Aristotelian schema. For Skinner, character is a myth: "since we cannot give a plausible account of the action of... complex... environment[s], we attribute...

achievement[s] to some admirable quality in the man himself. But such ‘faculties’ are suspiciously like the explanatory fictions against which the history of science warns us” (Skinner 1971, p. 68). As phlogiston theory and character theory are on the same par for Skinner, clearly his moral education aims solely at the modification of behaviour through the conditioning of a subject or the modification of their environment, which is to say that whatever is happening to the ‘virtuous agent’ internally is beside the point for him. The important consideration for Skinner is what goes on *outside* the person: the actual, observable performance of moral actions. Dispositions to act as such come as the result of moral education and training, Skinner claims, and do not emerge from the nebulous template which some call ‘character’. Kateb notes that for Skinner, “human nature is, in principle, fully understandable; and being fully understandable, it is, in principle, fully controllable, fully governable” (Kateb 1963, p. 197). Skinner doesn’t care about whether someone has ‘laudable desires’ or ‘disreputable desires’. Again, he cares solely about how people act, what moral actions they perform. Whether we call this set of behaviours a ‘character’ or not is merely a matter of semantics for Skinner: the subject is the same in either case. For the purposes of our discussion, we will continue to use the term ‘character’ as a useful conceptual expedient, while remaining agnostic about its metaphysical basis—though I have weighed in on this subject elsewhere (Yorke 2008).

In any case, in principle we should be able to gauge—and design means of consistently eliciting—a person’s disposition to behave in certain ways by observing the actions they perform in any given set of circumstances. These circumstances could include those of gameplay, to bring the discussion back around to Suits. Now part of what makes games good is, presumably, the opportunity they provide for players to exercise their agency: to make *meaningful* choices within the context of the game. Those choices should, if the game is sufficiently deep, reflect and inform (at least in part) the character of the player who makes them. From one side, insofar as “a virtue is generally held to be a character trait, a state of one’s character” (Hursthouse 2001, p. 11), we can expect the in-game choices that players make to be correspondingly uniform if they are sourced from the virtues. However, from another angle we can identify a possible tension between the restrictions inherent to a character-based action schema and the supposed openness of intraludary choice: for if my choice is uniformly conditioned or predetermined as a function of my character, how can it be considered an autonomous exercise of my free will? Do Suits’ utopian games condition the characters of their players, or provide opportunities for the expression of their characters? Can they do both, as parts of a mutually-reinforcing cycle?

This seeming tension can be slightly diminished by restricting the claim to there being *some* intra-ludary actions that can meaningfully express character,

while many cannot. Certainly, we will want to distinguish between certain *types* of intraludary actions: for does my choice to buy Park Place in Monopoly really express a virtue or represent *who I am* in a meaningful way? Only under certain conditions: I cannot, for example, simply be following a dominant strategy. If *any* competent player of Monopoly would have purchased Park Place under that certain set of circumstances as a 'rule of skill', then I clearly cannot claim that that move uniquely *represents who I am*, nor hope for it to be identified as virtuous. However, utopian games ought to be dramatically unlike Monopoly, which is to say that the opportunities that utopian games provide for meaningful choices to occur should be maximized, and expressions of virtue ought to be possible via their gameplay. So long as utopian games make variegated and difficult demands of their players, different virtues will be required to succeed at them, and different methods for expressing the same virtue might also be demanded with each instance of replaying. This line matches up with Suits' later postulate that 'sportsmanship' could exist as a utopian virtue elicitable by gameplay (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).

If the lives of Suits' utopians are, by definition, an endless series of games—interpretable as an indefinitely (or conceivably infinitely, if utopian immortality is a live option) long tournament—then their virtues can *only* be expressed through actions taken in the games they play. Therefore, utopian games ought to be a good mix of skill and chance, so that utopian lives are

neither boringly predictable (excluding all chance) nor boringly unpredictable (excluding all skill), and so the input of their characters has a chance to determine the outcome of many, though not necessarily all, competitive games. Thus, insofar as Suits' utopians are capable of having characters, these ought to be discernible via their gameplay, and *virtuous* gameplay ought to generally—but not always (so that matches are not foregone conclusions)—lead to intralusory victory in these competitive games.

Alasdair MacIntyre concurs that success—intralusory or otherwise—typically corresponds with the possession of the virtues:

If human life is understood as a progress through harms and dangers, moral and physical, which someone may encounter and overcome in better or worse ways and with a greater or lesser measure of success, the virtues will find their place as those qualities the possession and exercise of which generally tend to success in this enterprise and the vices likewise as qualities that likewise tend to failure. *Each human life will then embody a story whose shape and form will depend upon what is counted as a harm and danger and upon how success and failure, progress and its opposite, are understood and evaluated.* To answer these questions will also explicitly and implicitly be to answer the question as to what the virtues and vices are (MacIntyre 2010 [1981], p. 144, emphasis mine).

By MacIntyre's lights, virtue is less a matter of metaphysics and more a matter of socially and individually pertinent consequences; an ethical correlate to the theory of natural selection.³⁰ If we can get to successful consequences with increased reliability using behavioural controls, it is not clear why we should we

³⁰ There is an implicit concern here that linking *success* to *virtue* runs the risk of inversely linking failure to vice, a variation on the morally problematic practice of 'victim shaming'. I note it here in passing without further elaboration.

mourn the loss of our much-touted but less effective moral autonomy, which fails to consistently produce the desired virtuous results. Still, it may appear difficult to apply MacIntyre's schema to Suits' utopian vision, wherein all 'harms and dangers' have been sanitized from human life, and the only criteria for 'success' and 'failure' are those given by the rulesets of games—unless we are willing to concede the point that, in a life consisting of nothing but gameplay, losing games is the worst kind of harm imaginable, and winning games the best kind of success one would know.

Even if we accept the premise that exercising the faculty of moral choice is essential for the expression of virtue on the sports pitch, we cannot unambiguously accept that morally conditioned players are capable of expressing sufficient autonomy to accomplish this. Recall the example of Huxley's clockwork-being—autonomy is present at the beginning of the process of its creation, but it is completely exhausted in the act of making the ultimate choice to be transformed. Is this enough moral choice? Is it the right kind? Perhaps the gears can be loosened somewhat. Instead of a clockwork-being, we might picture an automatically virtuous agent as a heat-seeking missile, where the 'heat' being sought is *the good*. Such agents will always tend toward the good, but the good or right action to be performed will change with every new situation... and so such conditioned moral agents will at least be in a position of having a will free enough to choose and adjust their own moral 'trajectories' toward their ultimate

end of 'doing good'.³¹ As mentioned, there might be multiple equally plausible courses of action resulting in the same good being realized. In other words, due to the inevitable complexities introduced by the changing conditions essential to utopian games, some moral choice and participation is required in principle, even for the most strictly conditioned of utopian moral agents. The virtuous agent in utopia will be consistently engaging in reliable processes (though perhaps not accessible to immediate introspection), which will act as reliable indicators of moral value: and this constant exertion of moral judgment will satisfy the effort argument mentioned in the previous section, as well as the autonomy argument currently under consideration.

Thus, it appears as if the autonomy argument does not support the conclusion that virtue, predicated upon moral choice, is impossible in utopia. Virtue can be, and often is, conceived as more of an automatic response than a deliberate choice (even for those moral theorists who hold the concept of character to be central to their accounts of moral life). Furthermore, Suits' utopia cannot altogether do away with the complexity that necessitates moral choice; nor can moral programming do more than give his utopians a rough orientation

³¹ There remains some possibility that perfect moral agents may tend to isolate themselves, or to place themselves in morally comfortable scenarios. We might find them buying real estate on the quiet side of town, for example, to avoid being unwillingly embroiled in some situations which would objectively demand their active moral intervention. That being said: if we picture a utopian world as nothing but a global conjunction of just such tranquil neighbourhoods, then perhaps the willful evasion of conflicts requiring moral responses is a non-issue.

toward a constantly shifting behavioural target as ‘doing good’. That is, knowing the right action to take in any given situation, and the means required to effect it, will differ from agent to agent, place to place, and time to time. Without Suits’ leaving some avenues of moral choice open to his utopians, they would never be capable of following through with their vague imperative to ‘always do the right thing’, or ‘always do good’. Lived experience generates too high a level of complexity to have conditioned directives be anything but open-ended, and thus (admittedly limited) autonomy would remain, even in the face of the most effective behavioural conditioning. For some theorists, however, simply *behaving* in a morally good way is not sufficient to be an instance of virtuous behaviour—the virtuous agent must also *want* to be good, i.e. they must have the right set of *desires* to count as fully virtuous.

3.4 The Desire Argument: Desireless Virtue Is Impossible

Tony Milligan identifies *desires* as the motivating forces behind exercises of virtue (Milligan 2005). *Doing* the right thing is thought to flow naturally from *wanting* the right thing; recall that this is also discussed at length in Martha Nussbaum’s work, in *Love’s Knowledge*, wherein she emphasizes the importance of ‘educating the emotions’ towards virtuous ends (Nussbaum 1990). Milligan even allows for the possibility of *impossible desires*—wanting something that

could never be attained, such as “to be a tree, to be God, or undo the past” —the fact of which he uses to claim that desires do not *simply* collapse into dispositions to act, as there is no action that one could perform to bring an impossible desire closer to realization (Milligan 2005, p. 63). The utopian longing to ‘create’ more good people through founding an ideal society, however implausible the methods for accomplishing this seems, looks like a decent candidate for such an impossible desire, as well as one that could encourage us to behave virtuously.

Ironically, however, utopia has been broadly criticized for endeavouring to kill or dilute desire, either through indoctrination or desire satiation. Kateb reports that “the utopian impulse has been, for the most part, to reduce as much as possible the tension between individual inclinations and social precept, to make it as easy as possible to be adequate to the requirements of virtue (as virtue is defined in the given utopian society)” (Kateb 1963, p. 157). In other words, in utopia “the discrepancy between what men *want to do* and what they *ought to do* is at the smallest conceivable” (Kateb 1963, p. 166, emphasis mine). Nevertheless, a general anti-desire trend in utopian thought need not result in a paradox or contradiction: desire is here being employed as a means to achieve a greater utopian end: the eradication of (potentially destabilizing) desire itself.³²

³² This has traditionally been a central aim of stoicism, as well as various Eastern intellectual and spiritual movements, including Buddhism and neo-Confucianism.

Pre-utopian drives need not persist under realized utopian conditions—desire can be re-educated and channeled towards morally laudable ends.

There are three ways to effect this correspondence of desire with moral duty: (1) to lessen what is expected of the utopian citizens, or to make the laws and customs as loose as possible, so that the full range of usual—and in some cases unusual—human appetites are given full vent (see, for example, the Marquis de Sade's sexual utopia described in his *La Philosophie dans le Boudoir* as a good exemplar of this strategy) (Sade 2006 [1795], see Fifth Dialogue, "Frenchmen, Some More Effort if You Want to Become Republicans"); (2) to stifle desire, and thus vouchsafe stability via the employment of an ascetic ethos, social conditioning, eugenics, pharmaceuticals, or brain surgery; or (3) employ some admixture of the first two approaches. Most utopian schemes pursue some variation of the third option, making this category a rather heterogeneous one. But since our topic is not option (1), which is to say the subject of permissiveness in utopia, but rather the possibility and desirability of conditioned virtue, via the moderation or elimination of the natural passions, I will move to examine another possible argument against desire-stifling or desire-transforming option (2) utopians:

(1) Desires are the wellspring of both virtue and vice.

(2) Utopia destroys or dilutes desires.

Therefore (3) utopia destroys or dilutes both virtue and vice.

Paraphrasing John Stuart Mill (Mill 1977 [1859], from "On Liberty"), Kateb writes that "the passions are the source of all virtues; though in an ill-governed mind, the passions are, of course, the source of all vices... if you eliminate that which makes for vice you simultaneously eliminate that which makes for virtue. A lobotomy is the model for such a procedure" (Kateb 1963, 167, n. 31). Kateb's suggestion, that the aim or function of utopia is to level down the human subject via a form of 'desire lobotomy' or moral handicapping in order to come to a static state of satiety, sounds frankly *dystopian*—it reads like Aldous Huxley's description of embryonic and social conditioning of the Epsilon class in *Brave New World* (Huxley 2006 [1932])—and is quite at odds with our previous understanding of Suits' *utopia* as levelling up its citizens via some type of moral doping to embrace and enjoy a better, more fulfilling life of gameplay.

Thus, the desire argument against Suits, that his utopia destroys the conditions by which exhibitions of virtue and vice are made possible, through extinguishing human passions, does not hit its target. Suits, Skinner, Plato, and the other utopians under our current consideration, seek to *educate* rather than *extinguish* or *radically diminish* desires. There remains, however, a final and subtler argument against the possibility of utopian virtue left to consider—one that takes conceptual aim at any programme which aims to make virtue universal—namely, the homogeneity argument.

3.5 The Homogeneity Argument: Homogenous Virtue Is Impossible

(1) Virtue is a quality that needs to be 'salient' (noticeable) in moral actions, in order to facilitate recognition and imitation (*mimesis*) by others.

(2) Utopia creates (or enforces) homogeneity in moral actions (i.e., all utopians are perfectly virtuous).

(3) If all moral actions in utopia are homogenous, then no moral action can be more salient than any other in utopia.

Therefore, (4) virtue is not a quality that can be possessed in utopia.

Let us analyse the argument as it is stated: does virtue really need to be salient, as claimed in premise (1)? Briefly, yes. If we understand virtue as being exhibited through moral actions, it must be possible to practically identify those actions as either virtuous, non-virtuous, or vicious, if our account of virtue is to bear any relation to the real actions and behaviour of human beings—which is an obvious desideratum. Conversely, if 'virtue' cannot be discerned from within the set of extant moral actions, then the concept has no meaningful application.

Does, however, utopia truly require homogeneity in the moral actions of its citizens, as claimed in premise (2)? This strikes us as a more contentious claim. It does certainly seem that if moral agent A and moral agent B behave in exactly the same fashion, then *ceteris paribus* agent A will have little grounds on which to morally criticize (or praise) agent B, and vice versa. Such homogeneity neuters our practices of assigning praise and blame to moral agents, as in such a scenario we will lack the appropriate means for moral calibration. This seems to be an undesirable kind of utopian homogeneity, on the face of it.

We can easily imagine tragicomic scenarios resulting from the aforementioned state of moral homogeny: picture several utopian moral agents jumping into a river to save a drowning baby simultaneously—because they are incapable of resisting their behavioural conditioning to help out—and knocking their heads together in the process, while the infant continues to drown. Utopia cannot reasonably demand this type of complete homogeneity of its moral agents: in the hypothetical case of the drowning baby, it would produce a much better moral outcome if some utopians hung back on the riverside, while one or two of the closest individuals jumped in to help. This kind of successful rescue effort would require only moderate social coordination, i.e., an intuitively appealing division of labour supplemented by the possession of a common *ethos* of assistance. What we want is homogeneity in the *type* of moral agents and moral actions: homogeneity in that they are *all virtuous in type*, though the content of virtuous actions may vary from case to case according to context. Our baby-rescuers could each exhibit *different* virtues in the same collaborative effort of rescue—courage, wisdom, prudence—all based on the physical positions they happened to occupy at the moment when the baby first fell in the river. Kateb reminds us that “the [utopian] aim must be to construct a society in which individuality flourishes, but within the limits of excellence... the wish is to have all men alike in that they are excellent, not to have all men excellent in the same way” (Kateb 1963, p. 225). So a diverse set of human excellences could

conceivably flourish, even in Suits' utopia of perfected moral conditioning. Not every flower must bloom at once, nor every voice call out in unison—indeed, this is the very picture of a dystopia by modern standards.

Neither would it be desirable from a utopian perspective to have uniform homogeneity in non-moral actions, e.g. homogeneity in timing. For example, we don't want everyone in utopia to brush their teeth together at 8:00am, mop their floors at 9:00am, and do their shopping at 10:00am. Such a state of hyper-regimentation, accompanied by a synchronization of activity, would be catastrophic from the point of view of social coordination—and elevate social unity at inordinate costs to other goods. Nor, however, could we have a state of no social coordination, i.e. no division of labour and no common ethos, a completely disorganized system wherein agents would be prone to (unintentionally, perhaps) frustrate each other's attempts at virtuous actions. This would be a state of anarchy, not a utopia of perfect virtue.

Premise (3), however, that no moral action is more salient than any other in utopia, is clearly false, for the reasons given above. The homogeneity in moral behaviour we discussed was a homogeneity in type, not a homogeneity in the specific actions or the contexts in which they are performed. There will be certain actions performed at certain times, and these will have more salience than the same actions performed at other times, in other situations. If I sing well in choir practice, for example, it is all well and good, but perhaps it would be a more

salient action if I sang the same song solo, and in front of a concert hall.³³ The notes and melody of my singing would be the same in both cases, but while my solo effort produced a standing ovation from the audience, my performance in the choir received only tepid applause. Perhaps another singer's off-key squawking was more salient than my mellifluous baritone in our group recital on this occasion, tainting the overall reception. *C'est la vie*. And so it would go with instances of offering help when it was needed more in one instance than another (compare the value, say, of saving a drowning child over changing a flat tire for a troubled traveller): although all instances of offering help when it is needed might constitute a homogeneous moral type—all are instances of 'helpful' virtuous action—we are able to distinguish between these instantiations by dint of their differing moral 'weight' in the contexts in which they are expressed.

Thus the final argument against the possibility of virtue in Suits' utopia, that virtue cannot be salient in a utopia wherein everyone is virtuous, is patently false. Homogeneity of type within a range of moral actions is no threat to their salience because discrete exhibitions of human behaviour, which can be observed and weighted against other moral actions of the same type, are exhibited in necessarily different contexts. Perhaps the relevant grounds for moral discernment or critique in utopia might be the time and place in which an action

³³ To make this situation parallel with the problem of a fully-virtuous community: we might consider the possibility that every member of the audience can sing as well (or perhaps even better) than I can, but that they recognize that there is no need to do so during my recital.

was performed; e.g. the same action might have done *more* good if it were performed in a different place, or at a different time.

3.6 Summary

Suits' utopia of perfect moral conditioning does not, therefore, necessarily preclude the expression of virtue, despite his affirmations to the contrary. Conditions of life in the post-instrumental techno-Cockaygne may lessen the scope for moral effort, autonomy, desire, and heterogeneity, but do not altogether extinguish these. Considering the role of virtue within this utopian context allows us to contemplate new avenues of instilling and stimulating virtue, e.g. realizing human capacities via utopian gameplay, as we will discuss in the following chapters.

Chapter 4: 'The Alexandrian Condition': Suits on Games, Boredom, and Utopia

It is a commonplace that once a scientist or philosopher after great effort solves a major problem he is very let down, and far from rejoicing in the possession of his solution or discovery, he cannot wait to be engaged once more in the quest. Success is something to shoot at, not live with... We might call this state of affairs the Alexandrian condition of man, after Alexander the Great. When there are no more worlds to conquer we are filled not with satisfaction but despair (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189).

Bernard Suits posits that his utopians will experience the 'Alexandrian condition', finding life in a materially superabundant post-instrumental utopia to be necessarily existentially empty, because "when there are no more worlds to conquer we are filled not with satisfaction but despair" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189). With no real obstacles to overcome—no more frontiers to push back or push against—he predicts that utopian life would have no structure or purpose. As he claims elsewhere that utopians trapped in a culture of material plenitude would "die—or go mad—from boredom" (Suits 1984b, p. 8), it appears that he is committed to this logical and anthropological premise about the nature of post-instrumental existence. The 'crisis of leisure' represented by this Alexandrian condition motivates Suits' overall conclusion that games are a necessary element of utopian life; that only "game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189) and without them utopians would self-destruct. Games function here to alleviate the logically

inevitable existential boredom of utopia by giving utopians something meaningful to do, thereby pre-empting their self-destruction.

In this chapter, I argue that the apparently exclusive choice between Suits' utopia of gameplay and death by suicide is a false dilemma, one which obscures a 'third way' of positive boredom, cashed out as psychic self-mastery. Further, I offer a deeper reading of the internal logic of Suits' utopian vision, identifying two different temporal phases of his utopia. At time U_1 , just after the founding of Suits' techno-Cockayne, the Alexandrian condition affects 'freshmen' utopians by producing a state of existential meaninglessness and thereby conceivably motivating utopian suicide. At time U_2 , however, sufficient time will have passed for the surviving 'sophomore' utopians to adopt marvellous, meaning-generative utopian games as a tool for defeating the Alexandrian condition and realizing Suits' 'ideal of existence' in a utopia of gameplay.

4.1 The Dilemma of Gameplay or Suicide in Suits' Utopia

Suits asserts that if and when a techno-Cockayne is established, his new utopians would initially suffer an extreme existential crisis arising from an inversion of their previous, instrumentally-oriented, values: despondency, depression, and even suicide are all live possibilities in his utopia—call this the *utopian suicide thesis* (Suits 1984b, p. 8). Utopians would thus be offered

“occupational methadone” in the form of allowing them to act out their former jobs, “to mitigate the withdrawal effects of too abrupt a deprivation of the opiate their work had always provided” (Suits 19--c, p. 94), until they are made ready for more advanced forms of amusement. Here Suits is toying with an inversion of Karl Marx’s analysis of religion as an “opium of the people” (Marx 1977 [1844], “Towards a Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right: Introduction”, p. 64) by designating *work* as the opiate of his utopians. Marx himself took a similar stance when he wrote that “in a higher phase of communist society, after the enslaving subordination of the individual to the division of labour, and therewith also the antithesis between mental and physical labour, has vanished... labour has become not only a means of life but life’s prime want” (Marx 1977 [1875], “Critique of the Gotha Programme”, p. 569).

I refer to play-working utopians (those using occupational methadone) as playing *games-by-default*, so called only because *any* activity would be considered a game by Suits’ definition as “the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43) in the complete absence of instrumentally-compelled activity (i.e., every obstacle encountered in utopia, including work simulations, would be unnecessary, and voluntarily chosen). I contrast these with *games-by-design*, the utopian games specifically intended to fully and meaningfully engage their players by providing optimized opportunities for them to realize their capacities, those that Suits refers to as the “sports and

games unthought of today... that will require for their exploitation—that is, for their mastery and enjoyment—as much energy as is expended today in serving the institutions of scarcity” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). These games constitute ‘scarcity machines’ in themselves: i.e., they have limitations of means built into them by definition, via their rulesets, which combat the potentially deleterious effects of superabundance (Suits 19--c, p. 111), and therefore can give meaning to utopian lives.

I offer a reading of Suits that deflates an apparent contradiction between the two versions of ‘utopia’ that Suits seems committed to defending: the settled, harmonious utopia of gameplay, and the existentially bleak, suicide-inspiring utopia of *ennui*. There is a simple but meaningful distinction to be made between psychically disturbed freshmen utopians at time U_1 , in the unstable proto-utopia immediately after the techno-Cockayne obtains, and psychically perfected (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183) sophomore utopians at U_2 , in the stable utopia a sufficiently long period of time after the techno-Cockayne obtains (see Table 1, below). If this distinction stands, then Suits avoids contradiction on this front, for he is implicitly discussing two different types of utopians—happy and unhappy—both cohabiting one and the same utopia, but at different times. However, this does not address the larger question of why Suits would think humans entering into a culture of plenitude would immediately contemplate self-annihilation. To explain

that apparent leap in logic, we need to discuss the background of leisure studies more generally.

POINT IN HUMAN HISTORY	KINDS OF GAMES THAT ARE PLAYED
Present day	Set of known games
Immediately after techno-Cockaygne obtains, an unstable proto-utopia (U ₁)	Set of known games + set of former work activities replayed as games + set of unknown games
A sufficient period after the techno-Cockaygne obtains, a stable utopia (U ₂)	Set of unknown games

Table 1: Interpretation of Suits' implicit taxonomy of utopian games

4.2 The Crisis of Leisure

In the late 19th century, the 'leisure class' became concretized as a subject of sociological study in the work of Thorstein Veblen, who coined the familiar concepts of 'conspicuous consumption' and 'conspicuous leisure', recognizing these as distinctive hallmarks in the lifestyles of the elite (Veblen 2007 [1899]). Later, in the early 20th century, leisure became a broader cultural issue as the

wide-scale ‘technological unemployment’ presaged in the previous century came to provide the working classes with greater access to leisure opportunities than they were hitherto accustomed. This phenomenon become known as the ‘problem of leisure’, popularized in the work of John Maynard Keynes:

The economic problem, the struggle for subsistence, always has been hitherto the primary, most pressing problem of the human race... Thus we have been expressly evolved by nature—with all our impulses and deepest instincts—for the purpose of solving the economic problem. If the economic problem is solved, mankind will be deprived of its traditional purpose... must we not expect a general ‘nervous breakdown’?... for the first time since his creation man will be faced with his real, his permanent problem—how to use his freedom from pressing economic cares, how to occupy the leisure, which science and compound interest will have won for him (Keynes 2010 [1930], "Economic Possibilities for our Grandchildren", pp. 327-328).

The cultural upshot of technological unemployment is less hyperbolically parsed by an anonymous columnist for *Nature*: “As the machine lessens the volume of toil required from men and women, our social organization must be adapted to... a corresponding increase in the hours of leisure” (Anonymous 1937, p. 941). The problem of leisure is the first element that Suits selects for magnification in his utopia: by formulating a utopia wherein the rate of technological unemployment has reached 100%, he magnifies it into what I call a *crisis of leisure*—a culture shock caused by a sudden expansion of leisure time so great that, for many

utopians, death will (somehow) seem preferable to continued existence.³⁴ This is one aspect of Suits' Alexandrian condition.

There is a profitable comparison which can be drawn between the crisis of leisure and the phenomenon of *retirement*. For some, retirement is a boon, a chance to tackle important projects of self-realization, and for others (without such projects, or with health or money worries) it is a curse, where boredom and a sense of meaninglessness pervade all activities. Indeed, some individuals who identify too fully with their work lives do not survive their own retirements. Similarly, in the techno-Cockayne, the utopian population is retired *en masse* at U_1 , and "those who are able to learn and enjoy our games survive as happy Utopians... But those who cannot must... die out forever" (Suits 1984b, p. 24). Some utopians, in other words, are *not* expected to survive the transition from U_1 to U_2 . Suits clearly believes that without the adoption of meaningful gameplay, at least some inhabitants of his techno-Cockayne would simply waste away or kill themselves. He anticipates, in other words, mass suicide and perhaps other potential forms of societal upheaval that would threaten his ideal world (such as

³⁴ Suits actually magnifies *all* of these contemporary trends in his utopia: (1) his utopians have the fewest possible working hours per week [0 hours]; (2) live the longest possible lifespans [they are in perfect health, and conceivably have access to life-extending technologies] ; (3) have the greatest possible percentage of leisure time available to them [100%]; and (4) have access to limitless recreational technologies, including utopian "games so subtle, complex, and challenging that their inventors will be seen as the ludic Einsteins of the future" (Suits 1984b, p. 24).

rebellion), as soon as it was established.³⁵ Indeed, he predicts that there may even be a counter-utopian force of ‘ludic luddites’ who would struggle toward “the elimination—or at least a massive withholding of—labour-saving devices” (Suits 1984b, p. 20) to prevent the occurrence of U_1 , or to reverse U_2 entirely, “in order to escape the dreariness and despair of utopian gamerooms” (Suits 1984b, p. 21).

Here we might want to concur with J.C. Davis that the thought-experimental world that Suits describes, with its widespread self-destructiveness and predictable grounds for civil unrest, does not deserve the epithet ‘utopia’ (Davis 2003 [1981]). Davis, on the other hand, *does* seem to allow room for the possibility of *limited* existential despair and *occasional* suicide in his concept of Utopia as a sober installation of novel state apparatuses meant to promote the general good, built in line with established psychological and sociological facts and principles (Davis 2003 [1981], pp. 36-40). On the other hand, Cockayne—understood as perpetual collective satiety—seems to have less latitude for the negative emotions which would motivate suicide, in no small part because it has less of a connection to reality *in toto*—to the point that it is difficult to imagine

³⁵ This partially motivates the *duty to design*, Suits’ exhortation that “It behoves us... to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful games now, for if we solve all of our problems of scarcity very soon, we may very well find ourselves with nothing to do when Utopia arrives” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). For if we fail in this duty, the projected consequence for Suits is the annihilation of his utopia as soon as it obtains at U_1 .

human life under such conditions in the long term. Thus, by Davis' lights, Suits may be *right* about the bare possibility (but not the projected scale) of utopian suicide, while still being *wrong* about his conception of utopia.

Logically, if Utopia is an 'ordered and perfect totality' in Davis' intended sense, it occupies the conceptual space as one of the best possible worlds, and in the best of all possible worlds, people *generally* do not want to do themselves in. If people did, that would speak against utopia being one of the best of all possible worlds, because then we could easily imagine a better possible world—namely, a world wherein people *did not* generally want to do themselves in—a world less miserable.³⁶ And we would want to call *that* world 'Utopia' instead, as it would clearly be more deserving of the appellation. After all, suicide is typically understood as an expression of human misery, and if human misery has not been altogether extinguished in Utopia, then it should at least have been radically diminished, and along with it the presumptively reasonable grounds for killing oneself off. Reasonable grounds are thus lacking for asserting the speculative phenomenon of widespread Utopian suicide. However, to put the ball back in

³⁶ If utopia is built by humans for humans, it will bear the imperfections of humanity, and its institutions will have to account for these flaws. Thus, misery may well yet persist in some widespread form in utopia, and therefore logical and intuitive grounds for utopian suicide in the individual case might not be lacking. But the utopian precondition of perfect moral conditioning and unfailing psychological health might nevertheless be reasonably interpreted as precluding any suicidal impulses.

Suits' court, we must also discuss whether or not there are reasonable grounds for the speculative phenomenon of widespread *Cockaygnian* suicide.

The concept of the techno-Cockayne, with its perpetually sated and entertained patrons, might once again conjure up images of Robert Nozick's experience machine. Recall that in Nozick's thought experiment, satiety of desires comes at a regrettable cost of knowledge about the world: users of his experience machine are offered an endless string of any experiences they desire (without knowing they are in the machine) at the cost of being reduced to the status of a 'brain in a vat' with no interaction with, and therefore no true beliefs about, the world as it actually is (Nozick 2013 [1974], pp. 42-45). Suits, however, holds that we can simultaneously have all the knowledge that there is (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 186) *while still* satisfying all the needs and wants there are. The constant glutting of lower pleasures need not separate us from knowledge or experience of the higher reality in Suits' utopia. Although we may agree with J.S. Mill that it is "better to be Socrates dissatisfied than a fool satisfied" (Mill 1961 [1863], p. 410), it is better again to be a Socrates satisfied. And if the life of a satisfied Socrates is possible in utopia, then where does the spectre of Cockaygnian suicide in U_1 draw its apparent force from?

4.3 Existential Boredom

To address this question, we must consider another aspect of the Alexandrian condition: the phenomenon of *existential boredom*. Suits magnifies boredom from a condition we occasionally experience to a state that utopians would indefinitely endure. Boredom, writ large, would be the baseline condition of the denizens of Suits' techno-Cockayne, as robotic servants would materially provision both their essential needs and excessive desires. Suits reminds us that in his utopia, "there are so many goods being produced so abundantly that even the most acquisitive cravings... are instantly satisfied... yachts, diamonds, racing cars, symphonic performances, mansions, and trips around the world are as easily plucked from the environment as breadfruit is in Tahiti" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183). Due to this same thought-experimental wish-fulfilling technology, immortality for humans appears to be conceptually possible—at the very least, living forever is a desire that one *could* conceivably have and which the machinery *might* mysteriously grant (if physics does indeed go on holiday in Suits' utopia, as it seems to; he himself is silent on whether or not immortality is possible and whether his utopians are truly omnipotent or omniscient)³⁷—thus

³⁷ Suits claims that "nothing in my account of Utopia *requires* individual omniscience", though he permits us to "suppose that the Utopians have the kind of omniscience that includes mental telepathy, which *could indeed make impossible the playing of most games*" (Suits 19--b, pp. 24-25, emphases mine). If Suits' utopians are truly omniscient—having "acquired all the knowledge there is" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 186)—then, paradoxically, utopians cannot enjoy games *as* games, for 'all knowledge' presumably includes knowledge of the future; which includes the outcome of all future games. Games of chance can be parsed as deterministic if one precisely understands how the laws of physics decide what face a die will fall on, or exactly how the mathematics behind a computer algorithm will generate supposedly 'random' digits. Games of skill can also be

the scale of the problem is potentially magnified. Humanity's condition of universal, meaningless, and boring retirement could conceivably last indefinitely. This extreme case raises the most doubt as to whether or not "wonderful games" on their own would be enough to dispel Suits' predicted utopian *malaise* (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).³⁸ For it is not at all clear whether games can actually function in the role that Suits posits for them, as inexhaustible generators of existential meaning and defeaters of boredom capable of transforming freshmen utopians into sophomore utopians, or whether he has estimated their value out of all proportion.³⁹ With this projected homogeneity of utopian lusory

parsed as predetermined if the exact skill levels of all competitors and the particular moves they will make are accurately known in advance of a contest. It is a distinctive feature of a game for Suits that "the outcome is not known beforehand"—this is, for Suits, what separates a game from a performance or *scripted* undertaking (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 97-98)—he would hold that a game with a known outcome is no game at all. The only way out of this conclusion is either to (somehow) argue that knowledge of the future is not perfectly inferable from having perfect knowledge of everything in the present and the past, or to impose some limitation on utopian powers. Suits attempts to achieve this latter aim via the following injunction: "all the telepathic players need do is refrain from exercising that particular talent (that is, they, like any game player, will confine themselves to lusory means) *in order to* play games which require concealment or deception" (Suits 19--b, p. 25). I am indebted to Uku Tooming for initially bringing this point to my attention during my 2018 presentation to the Canadian Philosophical Association.

³⁸ Suits' 100% efficient, telepathically-controlled supercomputers would be the most effective suicide machines ever invented, if indeed the perfect programme of psychological conditioning outlined for his utopians (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183) would actually allow them enough latitude of desire to crave death in the face of unremitting existential boredom.

³⁹ Thomas Hurka criticizes Suits on precisely this point: that Suits "argues for the strong thesis that playing games is not just an intrinsic good but the supreme such good, since in the ideal conditions of utopia, where all instrumental goods are provided, it would be everyone's primary pursuit." Hurka, by contrast, favours "the weaker thesis that playing games is one intrinsic good" among many (Hurka 2006, p. 220).

experience, we might legitimately worry, with Shelly Kagan, that “game playing is not a rich enough diet to make life in Utopia worth living” (Kagan 2009, p. 393).

However, by adopting a more nuanced view of boredom than Suits offers, the existential crisis it is thought to motivate appears far less plausible. In Lars Svendsen’s *A Philosophy of Boredom*, we find his description of Martin Doehlemann’s typology of boredom (Svendsen 2008, pp. 41-42) which covers four separate species, one of which—‘existential boredom’—overlaps with Suits’ utopian schema, “where the soul is without content and the world is neutral” (Svendsen 2008, p. 42). Another, ‘boredom of satiety’, roughly translates to being tired of getting what you want, and therefore is also possibly descriptive of life under conditions of the techno-Cockaygne. Suits interchangeably conflates these two senses of the term, though Doehlemann holds them to be phenomenologically distinct. ‘Situative boredom’ is transitory and so less worrisome—it is tokened by the feeling of being stuck on a train when one would rather be elsewhere—and is easily defeated by changing one’s contingent location or activity. Finally, ‘creative boredom’ can actually have positive outcomes (despite being unpleasant to experience) in that it compels its subjects to engage in novel strategies and techniques for overcoming it. It is in this sense, perhaps, that Suits suggests “*boredom is the mother of play*” (Suits 1988a, p. 5). None of these varieties of boredom appear to logically require the people suffering from them to contemplate or commit the act of suicide; but neither do

any of them offer the possibility of reframing the experience of boredom into something experienced as good in itself (as opposed to being merely instrumental in producing desirable outcomes). That is to say, none of the items in Doehlemann's typology allow for the possibility of experiencing 'positive boredom': say, tranquillity as opposed to restlessness; acceptance, as opposed to dissatisfaction.

An analogue to the positive boredom I propose as an addition to Doehlemann's typology may appear in Suits' schema as the possibility of achieving 'nirvana' (Suits 19--c, p. 45). Here too, the "soul is without content and the world is neutral" (Svendsen 2008, p. 42), though the result is not distress, but peaceful acceptance. Such a state serves as anodyne for both worries surrounding death, and also the odd dissatisfaction that Suits predicts would occur to humans upon attaining a utopia of material superabundance. There is a certain peaceful, contented attitude towards existence that is presumably possible, and it doesn't require the agonistic mechanics of competitive gaming to achieve. In fact, the busywork of ever-increasing intellectual challenges that Suits proposes as utopian entertainments would likely preclude such tranquil nirvanic achievement. A durable base for utopian happiness, ironically, might not rest exclusively in gameplay after all, but in somehow achieving and sustaining a state of psychic self-mastery. But on Suitsian grounds, it should still be argued that it is active gameplay, and not a passive state of tranquility, that best expresses the

ideal of human existence—for games purportedly constitute meaning-generative life projects in a manner that merely experiencing a state of positive boredom (or, for that matter, taking an anti-boredom pill or having a surgical boredom-ectomy) cannot.

4.4 Games as Meaning-Generative Life Projects

Suits proposes that life projects are a meaning-generative technology, and negatively caricatures death as the interrupter of these life projects (Suits 19--c, p. 43). He considers various possible strategies for beating death (*qua* interrupter of projects), the most promising of which is by viewing life as a timed game wherein the timer is hidden from all players, in the fashion of musical chairs. Once one has *achieved* something—like finding a seat in musical chairs—it can no longer be interrupted, as the achievement has reached a state of completion by the moment the timer has sounded⁴⁰ (Suits 19--c, p. 46). If my life's purpose is to publish a book, for example, and if that book has been published, then that achievement is in a certain sense death-proof, though my mortal body may not be. He also argues that achieving certain mental states, such as nirvana, may

⁴⁰ Achievements are in this sense temporally transcendent, and on this ground intralusory achievements constitute Suits' best bet at salvaging his thesis of utopian gameplay as being the ideal of existence.

defeat interruption by death, in the sense that static states of consciousness are not interruptible in the manner that physical processes or progressions of mental states are (Suits 19--c, p. 45). Finally, he argues that viewing life as a timed game is a way to take *agency* over its termination, for “if a game is a thing which necessarily ends, then by intending to play... I would necessarily intend it to end” (Suits 19--b, p. 183). By bringing our intentions and expectations in line with the occurrence of death, accepting it as a necessary condition of the game of life, “if I play the game to its end, then—win, lose, or draw—death is no interruption” (Suits 19--b, p. 187). So, for Suits, life projects can be games, and in fact a life could be *nothing but a game*, and that game could still be meaningful. This theme is carried over from his earliest published articles (Suits 1967a), and has been revived by recent commentators (Kolers 2015).

In contrast, Bernard Williams argues that if character is stable and a lifespan is infinite, then immortality produces a meaningless existence because boringly repetitive experience is inevitable for static characters (Williams 1973, Chapter 6). And if character is *not* static, then we shouldn’t care about immortality because it’s not ‘us’ who are immortal but a series of successor characters who are importantly ‘other’—i.e., their set of projects will not be identical with our own, and so our lives would be interrupted in a fashion not unlike the occurrence of death, although our bodies would physically persist. Sophie-Grace Chappell best sums up this position in the following neat

reformulation: “Briefly: if [the immortal agent]’s life remains hers it goes round in circles; if it doesn’t go round in circles it ceases to be hers” (Chappell 2007, p. 38). Williams’ theory has direct relevance to projections of life in Suits’ techno-Cockayne, as it seems that there one could order ‘immortality’ from the wish-granting supercomputers as easily as one could a three-course meal.

This reveals a potential theoretical inconsistency in Suits’ schema. For if immortality is a live option in his techno-Cockayne (and if we take his word that utopian supercomputers really *can* deliver on any desire utopians can conceivably have, then we have good reason to believe that immortality *is* a deliverable good), then death is *not* a necessary condition of utopian life, and therefore death-*qua*-interrupter of projects *cannot* be defeated by viewing life as a timed game: the timer never sounds. In other words, in utopia we cannot lean on mortality as a natural endpoint for our game-lives, to provide them with structure and meaning, which leaves Suits open to Williams’ objection that “immortality, or a state without death, would be meaningless... death gives the meaning to life” (Williams 1973, p. 82). For even though we might view death as being trivially ‘defeated’ by the invention of immortality, the question of existential meaning for human lives under conditions of immortality remains.⁴¹

⁴¹ It is very odd, if not a contradiction in terms, to speak of ‘immortal human beings’, or indeed ‘post-instrumental human beings’. This may give us some grounds for us to suspect that it may be a successor species, and not our own, which would be able to successfully inhabit a Suitsian utopia.

As a possible defence against concerns such as Williams', we might raise Suits' own example of 'open games'—"games which have no inherent goal whose achievement ends the game" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 143)—which nonetheless seem to function to meaningfully structure human experience. Open games might be invoked as a means by which a meaningful existence under conditions of immortality could be made possible (though Suits himself does not make this move). Games of make-believe with no win conditions, but with the lusory goal of continuing the activity for as long as possible, would seem to qualify as meaningful activities which require no end-point; as would simple cooperative games such as hacky sack in which players succeed or fail as a group, no scores are kept, and iterations can be rapidly effected if desired. Moreover, such games seem ideally suited to utopian entertainment, since "open games appear to be essentially co-operative enterprises" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 149) and thus are a better fit with Suits' claim that "the culture of utopia will be based on plenitude"⁴² (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194)—for competitive behaviour can only be rational under conditions of *scarcity*, and his utopia eliminates all varieties of scarcity, even that scarcity of time we recognize as a the condition of *mortality*.

Indeed, there may be insufficient overlap between the experiences of such hypothetical entities and our own for us to relate to the contents of their consciousnesses, or adequately assess the biological gap which must obtain in order for utopians to achieve immortality.

⁴² By comparison, "our own culture is based on scarcity" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194) and is thus "more inclined to emphasize closed games" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 149) which are typically *competitive*.

More directly Chappell, *contra* Williams, rejects the idea that an immortal life would necessarily be a boring one, claiming that “only a person who *has* worthwhile projects can be justifiably bored by anything: if A is justifiably bored with X, then there is some Y with which A is, justifiably, *not* bored” (Chappell 2007, p. 41). Justified boredom is subjective, relational, and contrastive on Chappell’s account, not objective, agent-neutral, and absolute. Thus, on this view, meaningful existences *can* obtain for immortal entities, and in some cases immortal entities will find it *easier* to have meaningful existences than mortals, since their projects are never in danger of interruption (though, we might object, they are also under no deadline pressure to complete their projects either). Chappell’s position has interesting implications for Suits’ account, which we will now explore.

Suits’ chief existential concern arises from his utopians being bored, from having ‘nothing they *must* do’.⁴³ But even in the absence of instrumental concerns, there is always a host of ‘things that *can* be done’. Those things are games, for Suits: but none of them on their own would be *guaranteed* to stave

⁴³ As Scott Kretchmar notes, more generally: “*The Grasshopper* is fundamentally about boredom and how we might best cope with it” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 152). Kretchmar correctly identifies the concept of ‘occupational methadone’ or ‘games-by-default’ when he writes that Suit is primarily interested in “a particular species of games—one that, in effect, provides a substitute for work” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 152). My schema builds on his, however, in that I posit that Suits’ ultimate aim is to replace these play-working games-by-default, needed at time U₁ to help overcome the Alexandrian condition, with games-by-design—truly utopian games that go beyond mere labor-surrogates and express the ideal of human existence—at time U₂.

off boredom for all utopians—this is only logically necessary of the *set of all utopian games*. The defeat of boredom is their holistic purpose. But, as Chappell might argue, the phenomenon of utopians being bored with the particular games they contingently happen to be playing need not concern Suits, as it would only be certain individuals in that case, not all utopians, who would experience justified boredom at any given time; a general existential crisis in a utopia of gameplay is thus highly unlikely. Moreover, since boredom is taken to be essentially contrastive by Chappell, all bored individuals would necessarily have found sufficient sources of interest (i.e., projects) *outside* of certain games to existentially preserve themselves (even if those projects were necessarily contained within *other* games, or in training certain capacities in preparation for gameplay, or in archiving utopian activities in the form of writing tournament reports and the like).⁴⁴ Profound misery, not incidental boredom, seems to provide stronger justification for predicting suicidal behaviour—and we would, as noted, not expect to find such a profound level of misery in a techno-Cockayne. Games may therefore plausibly serve as a sufficient existential balm for enough utopians to defeat any assertion of universal misery.

⁴⁴ Interestingly, Suits holds that utopia is “the end of history itself, and with it the end of the future”; as such, the only occurrences of note would be “games won and lost, records achieved and broken, and the endless collection of such things as batting and earned run averages” (Suits 19--c, p. 117). Nevertheless, this does not mean that being a utopian archivist of records and statistics might not be a meaning-generative activity, or at least an activity that forms part of a holistically meaningful life.

Suits' existential thesis that the institution of gameplay will be enough to make life worth living for his utopians runs counter to Albert Camus' metaphilosophical position on the subject. Camus asserts that "judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy," and that "all the rest... are games" in a pejorative sense (Camus 1955, p. 3). For Suits, the 'fundamental question' of existence facing his utopians dissolves in the flow of gameplay (that is the purpose of games in his utopia, including the utopian game of 'philosophy'), while for Camus such activities merely obfuscate a deadly serious line of inquiry (for non-gamified philosophy). Their existential concerns, however, rest on similar grounds and have similar stakes: they both take the attraction of suicide, when put face-to-face with the inescapable absurdity of the human condition, seriously. Nevertheless, the solutions they offer to the existential problem are, in an important sense, diametrically opposed. For Camus, the resolution lies in the celebration of revolt, and in the embrace of freedom and the passions (Camus 1955, p. 47); for Suits it is in the submission to constitutive rules, and the willing adoption of the lusory attitude with regard to cerebral exertion. Suits' reply to the existential challenge is intellectual, whereas for Camus it is emotional.

We might reasonably attempt a synthesis of these two positions, as both intellectual projects *and* emotional commitments contribute meaning to life in the world as we currently find it. But if instrumentality is completely removed

from the picture, as it is in Suits' utopia, then emotional commitments appear to be off the table. For "if love and friendship could exist in Utopia, they would have to be... extremely attenuated forms" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 187) due to the lack of anything of consequence occurring—in fact, Suits claims that *all* emotional content is liable to disappear in the techno-Cockaygne, including "aspirations and frustrations, hopes and fears, triumphs and tragedies... joy and sorrow" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). Intellectual projects, on the other hand, could not exist outside the realm of the lusory—that is their only sphere of potential application in Suits' utopia—and if these were not incorporated with the appropriate zeal into the pursuit of some game's prelusory goal, they would constitute *trifling* (one of the few possible utopian *crimes*) on his account (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 50). From such a perspective, utopian life threatens again to be existentially meaningless on both emotional and intellectual bases.

To avoid this repugnant conclusion, Suits gives everything back in the final act. For with the installation of games-by-default and games-by-design in Suits' utopia at U_1 :

both admiration and sharing are again possible, and so love and friendship as well. And with the re-introduction of the emotions associated with striving—the joy of victory, you know, and the bitterness of defeat—emotional content is provided for art. And perhaps morality will also be present, possibly in the form of what we now call sportsmanship (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 193-194).

If utopian life is nothing more than “in fact nothing but a series—indeed, a network—of interlocking games” (Suits 1984b, p. 19), then Suits can reasonably expect that those games would be imbued with the same degree of serious intensity, and thus meaning, as in our non-lusory lives in the present.

4.5 Summary

I have identified two main components of what I call the Alexandrian condition in Suits’ utopia: the crisis of leisure, and existential boredom. The crisis of leisure is a scaling up of the cultural concerns first raised by the phenomenon of technological unemployment and the possibility of life without work. Existential boredom is the extreme magnification of the phenomenon of boredom as we experience it today, spread across the class of all U_1 (freshman) utopians, and made all the worse by the conceptual possibility of utopian immortality.

Suits’ reasoning for the utopian suicide thesis can be summarized in the following formulation:

P1) In the techno-Cockayne, there is material superabundance (no material scarcity).

P2) Without material scarcity, there can be no sufficiently meaningful activity for utopian agents which renders their continued existence worthwhile.

P3) Without such sufficiently meaningful activity, utopian agents will commit suicide or go mad.

Therefore:

C1) Utopian agents trapped in the techno-Cockayne will commit suicide or go mad.

In introducing a novel terminology which distinguishes U_1 from U_2 (sophomore) utopians in Suits' schema, I have shown (counter P2) that the utopian suicide thesis is only a concern for U_1 utopians— U_2 utopians are those who survive the transition from an unstable proto-utopia to a stable utopia; from the 'occupational methadone' of games-by-default to the 'wonderful' games-by-design that are unique to utopia. The crisis of leisure is easy to overcome for U_2 utopians, who are able to identify meaning-generative life projects in the games they play. Moreover, I have deflated the false dilemma (counter C1) between a utopia of gameplay and suicide from boredom which Suits proposes, by showing that (counter P3) on most accounts boredom alone does not motivate suicide; that positive boredom is a live and unexplored theoretical alternative, and thus that there therefore may be more to do in utopia than simply play games, for example, achieve and maintain a state of psychic self-mastery.

I have also examined Suits' positive utopian thesis:

P4) Games are the only tool with the capacity for artificially manufacturing artificial non-material scarcities in a predictable manner within the techno-Cockayne, without threatening its material basis of superabundance (i.e., with no decrease in plenitude).

P5) With the artificial non-material scarcity introduced by games, there can be existentially meaningful activity for utopian agents despite material superabundance.

P6) With existentially meaningful activity available to utopian agents, they may flourish in the techno-Cockayne.

Therefore:

C2) Utopian agents trapped in the techno-Cockayne may achieve human flourishing through the playing the games.

I have shown that (C1) and (C2) create an apparent contradiction when taken together, which can be resolved when my distinction between the two temporal phases of utopia at U_1 and U_2 is taken into account. (C2) is therefore promising, which means that reasonable grounds for suicide are lacking in the techno-Cockayne of U_2 .

Suits writes that “Alexander the Great... had run out of worlds to conquer by impetuously conquering the only world there was, [but] he *could* have given it all back and started over again, just as one divides up the chess pieces equally after each game in order to play another game” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 192). The Alexandrian condition is defeated in Suits’ utopia by precisely this method: each game is considered a world unto itself to explore; some will invite conquering; some will invite sharing; all will be restored to their original board states for potential replay when each session of gameplay is concluded. We reset the utopian gameboards, and thereby overcome the spectres of existential boredom

and the crisis of leisure, to arrive at Suits' ideal of existence: a flourishing life of meaningful gameplay.

Chapter 5: ‘Endless and Endlessly Boring Summer’: Suits’ Utopian Games Are Unknown and Unknowable

It behoves us... to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful games now, for if we solve all of our problems of scarcity very soon, we may well find ourselves with nothing to do when Utopia arrives... we should begin to store up games—very much like food for winter—against the possibility of an endless and endlessly boring summer... their serious cultivation now is perhaps our only salvation. That, if you like, is the metaphysics of leisure time (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).

In this chapter, I argue that in the absence of a suitably robust account of utopian games we have good reason to reject Bernard Suits’ utopian thesis that game-playing is the ideal of human existence. Suits himself does not give such an account of utopian games; thus, we must either give an account on his behalf, or reject the utopian thesis. But the set of utopian games is unknown and unknowable, hidden from our view behind an unbridgeable cultural gap between here and utopia. So Suits simply helps himself to the premise that there exists some possible set of games-by-design in his utopia, such that the playing of (a sufficient number of) its members would sustain an existentially meaningful existence for his utopians, in the event of a hypo-instrumental culture of material superabundance obtaining. I conclude that any implications of Suits’ utopian vision for the utilization of our leisure time in the present are vitiated by the collapse of his normative ideal: his ‘metaphysics of leisure’ misses its mark.

5.1 Suits' Utopian Games and their Relation to Contemporary Games

The post-instrumental techno-Cockayne that Suits details at the end of his groundbreaking contribution to the philosophy of sport, *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*, raises important philosophical questions about the ideal utilization of leisure time. For instance, given the parameters that Suits has stipulated for his utopia—that the social sciences have perfected the human psyche (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183); that telepathically-controlled machines can grant any material wishes one might have (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 182-183); that games are the *sine qua non* of utopian life (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), and not some other intrinsically-valued pursuit—what kinds of games will his utopians be likely to play? Alternately, what types of games will be impossible or forbidden for them to play? And why?

These questions about *utopian games* go unanswered in the text, at least in part due to a tension generated by Suits' claims about *contemporary games*. On the one hand, Suits advises us that “the games we play in our non-Utopian lives are intimations of things to come... They are clues to the future” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), and on the other that we have a quasi-urgent *duty to design*: “to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful [utopian] games now, for if we solve all of our problems of scarcity very soon, we may very well find ourselves with nothing to do when Utopia arrives” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). Though these clues are unspecified, and the duty to design seems dubious at

best, Suits' utopian vision presumably relates to our current recreational practices in two important ways: it exposes the relative crudity of our present ludic entertainments when compared to those of the possible future and, perhaps in part due to this, it recommends that our free time is better spent designing and developing new games than indulging in traditional ones. Suits therefore exhorts us to play less now, so that his utopians can play more later.

Leaving aside the contentious issues of intergenerational justice and possible duties to future persons (of varying degrees of likelihood—utopians being the least likely of possible future persons), the *causal link* that Suits posits between the games of the present and the games of the future calls for closer scrutiny. The form and content of these “sports and games unthought of today” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194) are left largely to the reader's speculation, other than Suits' assertion that pre-utopians are somehow capable of designing games for utopians by using relatively crude extant games as source materials or inspiration: call this the *clue model*, after the wording in Suits' quotation above. The unresolved tension of the clue model is that our current games are apparently so bad as to not be worth playing in utopia, and yet paradoxically so good that they can be used as a platform for designing future utopian entertainments.

I argue that there is no link vis-à-vis game design between utopian entertainments and our own, no road from here to there for creatures such as us.

The lives of Suits' utopians are so alien from extant forms of human experience and social organization that the task of designing games for them is impossible. His clue model is thus a dead end, because we are incapable of designing, or even describing, utopian games. If I am correct, then Suits' assertion that game-playing is of ultimate value in human life—that it constitutes an essential part of the “*ideal of existence*” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182)—comes under threat, because his utopia (the ultimate logical expression of that ideal) is inchoate.

5.2 Suits' Reticence Regarding Utopian Games

Despite the warm critical reception for *The Grasshopper*, and the many opportunities Suits had to return to its main themes subsequent to its publication, he never took any occasion to explicitly describe the types of games his utopians will play in his projection of the “endless and endlessly boring summer” of post-instrumentality (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). But the importance of describing utopian games for Suits seems undeniable. Such a description would illustrate and help ground his claim that “game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189). Conversely, without a concrete example to offer, Suits could be accused of assuming precisely what he needs to prove: i.e., that there is a set of games such that the playing of a sufficient number of them would preserve existential

meaning in a post-instrumental world (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189). Call this the *problem of reticence*.

Thus, describing utopian games in greater detail was a crucial task for Suits' project, and one that deserved his careful attention. The closest he comes to doing so, however, is in a short passage wherein he acknowledges that under conditions of post-instrumentality, activities that were once chiefly valued instrumentally could be 'replayed' solely for their intrinsic merits. His incomplete manifest of utopian games reads like a list of contemporary chores or vocations: utopians can play "fix the kitchen sink" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 190); "building the house" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 191), 'do scientific research' (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 192), and even "philosophy"⁴⁵ (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 193). What makes all of these disparate activities 'games' for Suits is simply the fact that the telepathically-controlled machinery which enables his techno-Cockayne could produce the end results of these processes instantly if desired, and so they are only being 'played through' because they are intrinsically valued by their 'players'. These activities are *games-by-default*—because everything in a utopia is

⁴⁵ However, claiming that there are epistemic conditions for determining philosophical 'completion' seems very odd indeed. How do we know, with an activity such as philosophy, when the game is over? What are the win conditions? Surely they are not as unambiguous or uncontroversial as those of fixing a sink or building a house. Perhaps 'winning at philosophy' means knowing all there is that can be known, including the knowledge that all that could be known *is* known in fact. The seeming impossibility of attaining such knowledge is a side issue for Suits which is not addressed here.

a ‘game’, in Suits’ intended sense of being voluntarily-pursued non-instrumental goal-driven processes—they are not *games-by-design*.

Importantly, Suits must have found these games-by-default to be insufficiently entertaining for his utopians, otherwise the threat of having “nothing to do when Utopia arrives” would not motivate the quasi-urgent duty he formulates “to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful games now” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). Therefore, not all utopian games could simply consist of the chores of today, stripped of their necessity. Otherwise ‘fix the sink’ and its ilk would do the trick of diffusing utopian existential angst and idleness on their own, and there would be no pre-utopian game design obligation to fulfil. The uniquely utopian games, the philosophically interesting ones which Suits claims will be efficacious in staving off boredom, must be of another genre altogether, in which designer intention is key.

So why didn’t Suits tell us more about the unique games-by-design his utopians would play, instead of dodging the issue with a misdirection—the claim that every possible utopian activity can be construed as a game-by-default?⁴⁶ And

⁴⁶ The closest Suits comes to committing to a description of utopian games-by-design is a vague claim in his “Games and Utopia: Posthumous Reflections” to the effect that utopians will play “really magnificent games—games so subtle, complex, and challenging that their inventors will be seen as the ludic Einsteins of the future” (Suits 1984b, p. 24). This hand-waving is, unfortunately, no more informative than its precursor passage in *The Grasshopper* wherein he invokes an image of “wonderful games”... “games that will require for their exploitation—that is, for their mastery and enjoyment—as much energy as is expended today in serving the institutions of scarcity” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).

what does this explanatory lacuna signify for the logic of his argument? We are nudged toward the position that Suits believed that he *couldn't* describe the kinds of games that utopians would enjoy in a philosophically satisfying fashion. His reticence on the nature of utopian games is best explained by the presumed epistemic inaccessibility of his subject. But if uniquely utopian games are inchoate, then his concept of utopia, which consists of an endless series of such games being played, is infinitely more so. Perhaps in acknowledgement of this, it would appear that Suits took the advice of his erstwhile theoretical foil, Ludwig Wittgenstein: "What we cannot speak about we must pass over in silence" (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §7).

Alternatively, perhaps Suits was strategically exploiting a well-established utopian rationale for omitting details of the desired future society. As Robert Nozick points out, "No person or group I (or you) know of could come with an adequate 'blueprint' (much less be trusted to do so for a society of beings as complex personally and interpersonally as they themselves are... In view of this, it is strategically shrewd of groups who wish totally to remake all of society according to one pattern to eschew stating that pattern in detail and to keep us in the dark about how things will work after their change" (Nozick 2013 [1974], p. 313 footnote). Thus, some degree of reticence, or at least an intentional omission of key details, may be required in order for a utopian vision to be sufficiently compelling to its target audience, who might otherwise be repelled by some

incidental detail in its description. I call this a *pig-in-a-poke utopia*, wherein would-be utopians are asked to subscribe to a vision of an ideal society without full cognizance of its overall constitution or societal implications, as opposed to a *blueprint utopia*, wherein each significant feature is adequately described and rationally defended (or is at least rationally defensible) to its prospective adherents.

Suits' reticence cannot, however, be entirely attributed to pig-in-a-poke utopianism. For Suits does not claim that utopians play unknown games simply because playing unknown games is the best thing they could be doing. In fact, he takes great pains to insulate his utopia from charges of normativity in the following passage: "The Utopia I envisage is not a state of affairs that is ideally *desirable*, it is simply a state of affairs that is logically *inevitable*" (Suits 1984b, p. 15). This is because the aim of all work is its own extinction—it is "self-defeating in principle" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 10). Accordingly, games are (descriptively) the only remaining candidate for human activity in a utopia where the need to engage in purely instrumental activity has been eliminated. As Suits plainly puts it, "we work so that we won't have to work; nothing else makes any sense to me" (Suits 1984b, p. 16).

Nevertheless, given the history of its use, it is impossible to employ the term 'utopia' without some normative connotation being evoked. If utopia is not thought to be the 'best of all possible worlds', then it at least elicits a 'better

than' comparison with the world of here and now. Suits, indeed, glowingly refers to a life of game-playing as "*the ideal of existence... a state of affairs where people are engaged only in those activities which they value intrinsically*" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182). Though Suits thus does seem to regard utopia as the best possible state (despite his protests to the contrary noted above), wherein the necessary evils of work are finally rendered obsolete, with his philosopher's caution he was hesitant to furnish it with excessive detail, which might have created hostages to fortune for his argument. Despite this descriptive paucity, using Suits' own unique logic of utopia we can meaningfully say more than he did about the necessary restrictions on what games-by-design can reasonably be called 'utopian' and those that are not deserving of the appellation.⁴⁷ More precisely: we can map out the conceptual space that utopian games *cannot* inhabit.

5.3 Unpacking Suits' Negative Account of Utopian Games-by-Design

To reiterate: if we make the strong claim that Suits' reticence is the result of it being conceptually impossible to describe utopian games-by-design, then Suits' utopia is itself conceptually impossible. And if his utopia is conceptually

⁴⁷ Certain pre-utopian games-by-default, such as 'plot a murder' and 'incite a riot', which presumably should not be 'replayed' in utopia for whatever intrinsic merits they might be seen to possess, as such entertainments would threaten the moral and political foundations of the enterprise.

impossible, then it cannot also be “logically *inevitable*”, as he claims (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 15), but is inchoate. And if Suits’ utopia is inchoate, this consequently threatens his claim that a life of game-playing is the ideal of human existence.

A more charitable explanation for Suits’ silence on utopian games-by-design than their conceptual impossibility would be to say that at the moment of writing, they contingently could not be described by him, due to limitations on his imagination, a lack of time, or some other obstacle. This opens up a space wherein we might be able to repair Suits’ schema by offering our own account of what utopian games might look like. To be clear, what we are looking for here is not specific rulesets, nor game mechanics, nor a description of components: that would be overly presumptuous for pre-utopian game designers and philosophers alike. What we are looking for—what Suits failed to provide—is a range of parameters that utopian games-by-design must fall within; a set of conceptual boundaries that they cannot exist outside of. In other words, our best bet of getting a rough idea of *what utopian games are* is by delineating *what they cannot be*.

First, let us take Suits’ general assertion that “in Utopia no evil or wrong can befall anyone” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). It clearly follows from this premise that immoral games will be forbidden in a Suitsian utopia. So games that necessarily, in the course of playing them, incur irreparable physical harm upon their participants—such as Russian Roulette and boxing—will be excluded from

the utopian set.⁴⁸ Similarly, games that require players to engage in immoral behaviors like bald-faced lying in order to play effectively—Werewolf and Diplomacy come to mind—will be off the menu as well. What is left in utopia are moral games, and games with negligible moral content—non-moral games.

Secondly, because “all possible interpersonal problems have been solved by appropriate methods” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 183) in Suits’ utopia, his utopian games will not be ruined by the bad behavior of their players. Cheating, trifling, spoilsporting, bullying, and grousing behaviors will all be pre-emptively (if somewhat rather mysteriously) eliminated. Admittedly, this has more to do with *how* games will be played in utopia, rather than *what* kinds of games will be played in utopia—but how people play a game (as part of its *institution*) has as much to do with the lived experience of playing it as do the rules themselves. Utopian Soccer, for instance, would be an experientially very different game from soccer as we currently play it, because its institution would necessarily be altered

⁴⁸ It becomes more difficult to rule out boxing as a utopian sport if optimally-protective gear, pain-negating drugs, and the guaranteed full medical restoration of participants to their pre-match levels of health are brought into play as possibilities (so that most matches are decided on points rather than knockouts). But other objections can be brought to bear if we take the line of making utopian sports completely anodyne. Keith Thompson, for example, attacks the desirability and intelligibility of Suits’ utopia precisely because “there would be no pain, suffering, or disappointment” in it (Thompson 2004, p. 60), and thus no high-level competitive sport would be possible. Utopia is no country for losers, and thus no country for competition either. Although Suits did not specifically respond to Thompson’s criticism, one potential way to diffuse it would be to posit that utopian games are necessarily *cooperative*. That way, Suits could have kept the good of ‘striving’ against unnecessary obstacles without reintroducing the emotionally unbalancing extremes of the “joy of victory” and “bitterness of defeat” resultant from besting, and being bested, by others in competition (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), which arguably threaten his utopian thesis that “the moral ideal of man does, after all, consist in game playing” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 193).

under utopian conditions even if its ruleset stayed roughly the same: there would be no more faking of injuries in attempts to incur penalties on the opposing team, no curses shouted at the other team's players or the referees, and perhaps no need for referees as all, as utopian players would be unfailingly self-regulating. Utopian games would be played in a morally non-problematic fashion, regardless of the players' skill levels, and thus the experience of playing with and against others in utopia would always either be positive or merely neutral (at the absolute worst), rather than be negatively tainted by displays of poor sportspersonship.⁴⁹

Finally, we have Suits' warning that boredom will pose an existential threat to his utopians, since "there does not appear to be anything to *do* in Utopia, precisely because in Utopia all instrumental activities have been eliminated... everything has already been achieved" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 188). It is for the purpose of giving utopians something meaningful to do, to combat the deleterious effects of boredom, that games are required in Suits' schema to begin with, and on that basis they are afforded their high status of being "the essence, the 'without which not' of Utopia" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). So utopian games

⁴⁹ William Morgan helpfully commented (after a presentation of an earlier draft of this chapter) that the moral status of a *feint* in utopian sport should not differ from its status in contemporary sport: it should not be considered to be immoral or unsporting behavior, but rather lauded, even on the rarified pitch of utopia. This is line with Kathleen Pearson's distinction between 'strategic deception' which is considered to be an essential part of skilful gameplay and includes feinting, and 'definitional deception', which is outright cheating and includes intentional fouling, on her account (Pearson 1973).

cannot be boring: that would be self-defeating, for boring games would threaten to destroy a utopia wherein there is nothing to do but play games. Boring games would include soluble games (those with a dominant strategy that, once known, leave no opportunity for the exercise of meaningful player agency, like Tic-Tac-Toe), games of pure chance (those that leave no opportunity for the exercise of meaningful player agency because strategy and tactics cannot have any impact on their outcome, such as Snakes & Ladders), and games of pure skill (like chess—since utopians will have endless hours to devote to its study, and live in a time “when everything knowable was in fact known” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 192), including optimal moves for all possible game states, chess would likely be as solvable for utopians as Tic-Tac-Toe is for us).⁵⁰ From this we can infer that utopian games will be well-designed, with a healthy mixture of skill and chance,

⁵⁰ Potentially, however, utopians could play complex games of pure skill with a handicap, by denying themselves reference to the sum total of all information contained in their supercomputers (assuming, for the moment, that the rote memorization of all optimal moves for all possible game states for such a game would be cognitively impossible), or perhaps by *cognitively handicapping* or *impairing* themselves with *performance-inhibiting* substances. If games are valuable in utopia because they are ‘scarcity machines’, then in order to play certain games utopians might make unorthodox requests of their supercomputers to generate scarcity, such as “Give me a limp” to make football more interesting, or “Make me forget all I know from the chess manuals I’ve accessed” to make chess more interesting. This is the inverse of technological doping *qua* enhancement. Consider chess grandmaster Bobby Fischer dosing himself with LSD to make a chess game with a novice more challenging (rather than, say, the novice letting a supercomputer find the optimal moves for him): a ‘doping down’ rather than a ‘doping up’. But radically depriving oneself of the realization of one’s human capacities looks like a kind of self-harm occurring in utopia, which Suits rules out in *The Grasshopper*, for “in Utopia no evil or wrong can befall anyone” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 185). Thanks to Alex Barber for originally bringing this intriguing puzzle to my attention.

resulting in their insolubility.⁵¹ Thus Suits can conceivably hold that such games would indefinitely maintain the interest of his utopians, by continuously generating meaningful problems for them to work out.

5.4 We Cannot Design Utopian Games: Thus, There Is No ‘Duty to Design’ Them

We can posit the conditions for life in a post-instrumental utopia as Suits does, via stipulation, but that does not bring us any closer to understanding what it would be like to *be* a utopian living under those conditions. The first move is a logical delineation, the second an imaginative exercise which seems likely to fail due to the epistemic inaccessibility of its object. The cultural gap between a society dominated by instrumentally-oriented behavior, such as our own, and a society which solely exhibits intrinsically-oriented behavior, such as Suits’ utopia, seems too wide to bridge. If this is in fact the case, then attempts to figure out the values of a post-instrumental entity (such as a Suitsian utopian), and therefore understand what types of games might suffice to entertain them, must

⁵¹ It should be noted here that no utopian game can be played for any meaningful *stakes*. Because material superabundance is vouchsafed in Suits’ utopian schema by his telepathically-controlled supercomputers, the prospect of material loss or material gain can add nothing to the interest or enjoyment of games. Utopian game mechanics must stand or fall on their own merits, without extrinsic sweetening. As Suits observes, “if Utopians tried to play poker they would find that they could not” (Suits 19--c, p. 114) but “in contrast bridge, for example, is a Utopian game, for in it nothing is at stake” (Suits 19--c, p. 115). However, in this passage it is nothing more than bridge’s *lack of stakes* that single it out as being a distinctly ‘utopian’ game: and although lack of stakes might be a *necessary* condition for utopian games, this feature cannot in itself be taken as *sufficient*.

remain in the realm of pure speculation (aside from the relatively uninformative negative parameters outlined in the previous section), and thus outside the purview of philosophical analysis.

Let us assume that there is a good chance that our living as we do, in a world with a very high degree of instrumentally-oriented activity, would make it difficult for us to understand the values implicitly expressed by utopian games. The lack of comprehension or basic interest may cut both ways: we probably couldn't, or wouldn't want to, play utopian games; and utopians probably couldn't, or wouldn't want to, play ours. Suits himself posits this cultural gap which, if taken at face value, seems to vitiate the duty to design: "Utopians will look back on names like Queensbury, Naismith, the Parker Brothers, even Rubik, with the same indulgent condescension that that today's physicists look back on those ancient investigators who proclaimed air, earth, fire, and water to be basic elements of nature" (Suits 1984b, p. 24). By Suits' reckoning, contemporary game designer Richard Garfield is no more qualified—or statistically likely—to design a utopian game than Heraclitus was to design an atomic bomb.

Let us explore one of the many potential ways this cultural gap could mitigate against there being an intentional causal link between the games of today and the games of tomorrow (although my position does not stand or fall on the plausibility of its specifics—for there are a multitude of other potential avenues of cultural gap exist which could be similarly investigated). Many

contemporary games trade on the thrill on defeating an opponent for their appeal and, as it happens, a feature of our contemporary society is that defeating others (who we often organically characterize as opponents or competitors) is instrumentally required for us to succeed in achieving many important goals. Key turning points of our lives can often take the form of contests over scarce resources: like getting a job at the expense of another applicant, or securing a mate at the expense of a sexual rival. But, as Suits asserts, “whereas our own culture is based various kind of scarcity—economic, moral, scientific, erotic—the culture of Utopia will be based on plenitude” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). This one change turns the world on its head, and radically redefines both the broad strokes and the minutiae of the culture. And as games imitate—or, perhaps more accurately, simulate—life, we can reasonably postulate that many utopian games would lack the combative, zero-sum design of many of our contemporary games. For who is to say that a psychologically-perfected utopian, freed from instrumental pressures in a world of material superabundance, wouldn’t dismiss our entire category of competitive games out of hand as being brutish and perverse?⁵² Alternately, wouldn’t we presumably find cooperative utopian games

⁵² This line might be misconstrued as running counter to Robert L. Simon’s popular notion of competitive games as a “mutual quest for excellence” (Simon, Torres, and Hager 2015, Chapter 2). For Simon, competition itself is cooperative and not zero-sum, as it provides the precondition for achieving certain kinds of excellence, and thus redounds benefits to all contracting participants. My suggestion here, however, is simply that utopians from a ‘culture of plenitude’ might reasonably find games with overtly competitive themes or mechanics to be gauche or passé, and thus refuse to play them on aesthetic grounds (leaving aside, for the moment, the thornier issue of their potentially eschewing competition on moral grounds). This is an entirely different point than Simon’s concern.

to be rather dull, flat, and abstract for our relatively vulgar tastes? The fact that we are simply not in the epistemic position to decide the matter either way serves to weaken Suits' assertion that we have a duty to design marvellous games for his future utopians. Even by his own lights, we are likely extremely poor candidates for such a task—recall the 'indulgent condescension' that he predicts his utopians will look back at the game designers of today with—and the intuitive appeal of his pessimism is almost certainly down to probable essential cultural differences between ourselves and utopians. Again, whether it is competition, or some other feature(s) of our contemporary games that utopians might find either offensive or banal, is relatively trivial: the point here is the probable conceptual unsuitability of contemporary games for the purposes of enabling utopian leisure, on x plausible grounds or y.

So to claim, as Suits does (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), that we have a present duty to engage in guesswork as to the favored leisure activities for an alien culture filled with under-described hypothetical entities, seems implausible at best. This implausibility of a duty to design utopian games is magnified if one takes into consideration how terribly low the probability of our success would be, combined with the fact that contemporary humans such as ourselves come with pre-existing pressing instrumental concerns of our own which must take moral and pragmatic priority. Further, the odds of Suits' post-instrumental utopia ever obtaining, and thus of utopian persons existing sometime in the very distant

future that we might arguably have moral duties regarding, are lower still. This means that all other moral duties to actual persons would take probabilistic triage over that of designing utopian games, up to and including the duty of creating a state of post-instrumentality. Suits puts his rhetorical cart before the horse here, as the duty to *build* a utopia must be logically prior to any duty regarding its *preservation* once established.

If, indeed, we attempted to fulfil this purported Suitsian duty in the present, given the projected temporal and cultural gap between our society and that of utopia, the games we designed would likely have as low a chance of serving the function of utopian entertainment as a Neanderthal game designer's invention would have of entertaining us contemporary *homo sapiens sapiens*. In other words, a *hyper-instrumental* culture (where nearly all activities are instrumentally-oriented) would face similar difficulties in designing games for an *instrumental* culture (like ours—where many, but not all, activities are instrumentally-oriented) as an instrumental culture would face in designing games for a *hypo-instrumental* one (where hardly any activities are instrumentally-oriented). It is, perhaps, an expression of hubris to assume that Tetris would have any more grip on the utopian imagination than Throw-a-Rock has on ours.⁵³ Nozick makes an analogous point when he writes: "It is helpful to

⁵³ With all due considerations to shot put enthusiasts, a caveman could not have *intended* to 'design' modern shot put for us, with its standardized equipment and rules governing bodily movements (although my hypothetical primitive sport of Throw-a-Rock—or something very like

imagine cavemen sitting together to think up what, for all time, will be the best possible society and then setting out to institute it. Do none of the reasons that make you smile at this apply to us?” (Nozick 2013 [1974], pp. 313-314).

Without any realistic picture of the content of a post-instrumental culture, we lack the perspicacity to apprehend the ideal forms of utopian amusement. Just as we are best able to hit dartboards that are visible and within throwing range, we best design games (as we best make clothes, write plays, and generate other forms of cultural product) when we have a target audience in mind that are like ourselves, or are at least hypothetical entities that are closely relatable. Without that context, the conceptual divisions between games, performances, and rituals are not readily decipherable, and what was intended to entertain only serves to confuse. Kabuki theater would, for example, likely alienate the viewers of contemporary American reality television—an audience it was never tailored to, possessing different tastes and expectations. Similarly, we have good reason to believe that the games we would design for the amusement of Suitsian utopians would fail to bridge the cultural gap, and so baffle or bore them, rather than amuse. Game design aimed at a utopian audience would constitute a shot in the dark, at a target of unknown proximity.

it—might indeed be its genuine historical ancestor and efficient cause of shot put). A caveman simply intends to *play* Throw-a-Rock; the tides of time and custom build up (or fail to build up, in the case of non-viable games) the institution from there.

It would seem, paradoxically, that members of a truly post-instrumental culture could not design games for themselves, either; for this would constitute instrumental activity, and violate Suits' definition of utopia itself. Call this the *problem of design*: utopians cannot design their own games in the future, and neither can we in the present; so utopian games are impossible to design (although they might indeed 'evolve' *unintentionally*; as the jumbo jet can be plausibly regarded to have evolved unintentionally from the designs of the Wright brothers—or shot put from Throw-a-Rock).⁵⁴ Thus, to return to the issue of Suits' purported duty to design utopian games: we cannot reasonably be held to have a moral duty to design impossible objects.

In addition to this problem of design, the problem of reticence—Suits' apparently inability to adequately describe post-instrumental life, as evidenced by the lack of a convincing blueprint utopia in his work—might be a source of still further trouble for his account. For if post-instrumental existence is ineffable, and thus inchoate, then a utopia built on its grounds is doubly so. And, bearing in mind the stakes as previously stated, if Suits' utopia goes, then so too does his assertion that a life of game-playing constitutes the 'ideal of existence'. Thus, let

⁵⁴ We are compelled to assume that Suits' utopian supercomputers are incapable of designing sufficiently entertaining games to guarantee the amusement of their operators: otherwise his exhortation for us to design games in the present for future generations of utopians to enjoy would be completely robbed of its force.

us now turn to a closer examination of post-instrumental life, in order to gauge its prospects for intelligibility.

5.5 Is Post-Instrumentalism Intelligible?

As Andrew Holowchak points out regarding Suits' utopia, even telepathically ordering your next meal is instrumentally-oriented activity, regardless of the brevity of the task (Holowchak 2007, p. 91). It is *work* of a kind, despite being comparatively less laborious than our current practices of food preparation. And the *need* to eat has, conspicuously, not been extinguished in Suits' vision of utopia. Nor has the need to relieve boredom, the (evidently instrumental) purpose which games purportedly function to serve therein. So, Suits' claim that his utopia is post-instrumental seems, strictly speaking, to be false: for as long as essential needs remain, then so too will instrumental activities be required—no matter how trifling—to satisfy them.

Human beings—as individuals, as a species, and as the prospective inhabitants of a utopia—will always have physiological needs, at the bare minimum. So *pure* post-instrumentalism may be unintelligible for creatures like us, which means that an absolutist reading of Suits' utopia is similarly beyond the pale: and thus it is probably not what he intended. Otherwise, Suits would be caught on the horns of a dilemma: either there would be so little instrumentally-

oriented behavior in his utopia that it is necessarily inchoate to us qua instrumentally-oriented beings, or else there would turn out to be so many instrumental concerns occupying the thoughts of his utopians (as they telepathically controlled their need-fulfilling machines) that his post-instrumentality would be a sham—utopia thus stated would just be instrumentalism at one remove. Call this the *problem of post-instrumentalism*. Since the first horn of the problem has been adequately explored above, and its prospects for a satisfactory resolution found dim, let us consider whether or not there exists a more charitable, less absolutist interpretation of the second horn which can rescue Suits' position.

Scott Kretchmar argues from an anthropological standpoint that human beings have always been a need-driven species, and that this helps explain how we have become the problem-solving and problem-seeking animals we are today (Kretchmar 2006, pp. 72-73). We needn't completely buy into a Darwinist line to appreciate Kretchmar's perfectly reasonable observations about our species' unique relation to obstacles, which stands as one of our defining characteristics. If Kretchmar is correct, we were made into metaphorical 'ants' by pre-historic and historical pressures; all wholly-intrinsically-oriented Suitsian 'grasshoppers' died out along the way, leaving instrumental thought hardwired in us to the point that we are incapable of living life without it. Presumably, this is what makes a life of game-playing ideal for Suits' bored utopians (whom he implicitly situates

on a psychological continuum with ourselves—their ultimate boredom is, rightly or wrongly, nothing but a hypertrophic projection of our own fleeting boredom): the surrogate instrumentality of solving contrived problems is itself intrinsically valuable, regardless of whether these problems are generated by features of games-by-design or games-by-default.

An underlying implication of Kretchmar's stance is that strict post-instrumentalism would require radical post-humanism as its base; only then could the need for the existential crutch of artificial obstacles supplied by utopian games conceivably fall away in Suits' schema. Shifting the goalposts of human experience and cognition would, indeed, constitute a possible resolution of the dilemma posed above: when you change the species, you change its utopia. However, allowing transhumanist considerations to enter the utopian frame would obviously greatly exacerbate the problem of cultural gap.

But perhaps coming at what are essentially philosophical issues of leisure from a species-perspective is a misguided strategy from the beginning. By zooming out too far we may lose focus on the very phenomenon we are attempting to study. It is arguably a weakness of Suits' account of utopia of game-playing that it treats boredom as an undifferentiated cultural phenomenon that can be collectively diagnosed and addressed *en masse* (in his case, by the invention of new games), whereas phenomenologically speaking, boredom is a profoundly personal issue that must be addressed on an individual basis. What

dispels *your* boredom, in other words, may or may not suffice to dispel *mine*, and in fact might only exacerbate it.⁵⁵ The seemingly political issue here—the collapse of a future society through endemic boredom—looks like it may be reducible to a merely personal matter.

Utopia, as a political ideal, does not necessarily mandate the manner in which individuals deal with their personal travails. As J.C. Davis writes, regarding the designer of utopias: “his prime aim is not happiness, that private mystery, but order, that social necessity” (Davis 2003 [1981], p. 38). Human beings are taken to have an irreducible set of essential needs, and the task of a utopia is to optimally address these: *qualia* resulting from this process are beside the point. Utopias (as a Davisonian category of ideal society) are not constructed to probe the ‘private mystery’ of the experiential content of their citizens—neither their private joys, nor their private miseries—but with designing state structures, the constitutions and laws which best function to provide the preconditions for human flourishing (the bedrock that sustainable happiness rests on).⁵⁶ Thus it seems that Suits has not actually designed a ‘utopia’ *per se*, but rather described

⁵⁵ Our previous discussion of Lars Svendsen’s ‘typologies of boredom’ in *A Philosophy of Boredom* (Svendsen 2008, pp. 41-45) should serve to establish just how subjective and multifaceted the phenomenon of boredom actually is.

⁵⁶ Despite this fact, it may still be reasonably considered a misnomer to call a society wherein the framework for meeting human needs was conceptually optimized, but all its citizens were contingently miserable, ‘utopia’.

the cultural apparatus of an alien species, which (mis)understands boredom as a social problem which can be objectively and universally solved.⁵⁷

Setting aside the semantic difference between Suits and Davis for the moment (which is, of course, not *purely* semantic, for Suits has built a logic around his own unique definition of utopia), let us return to a key point of distinction which, once made, may clear the waters somewhat. If we charitably modify Suits' definition of utopia as being strictly post-instrumental to being merely hypo-instrumental, then perhaps his vision of utopia can be rendered intelligible, and his ideal of existence validated. We might imagine that his utopians are like us, except they need to do far, far less to obtain the objects of their desires. This is a potential method for making utopians into relatable hypothetical entities.

The quality of relatability is, however, not binary but locatable on a continuum. There may be some elements of utopian life we can identify with, but other crucial features—such as the paradigm shift necessitated by the move to a culture of plenitude from a culture of scarcity—that are irreducibly foreign to us. I

⁵⁷ Utopia, qua cultural apparatus, is a moving target: its composition will change with the culture that generates it. Even assuming that the base set of essential human needs is static and objectively discernible, the optimal manner of meeting those needs in a meaningful way will differ according to time, place, and custom (ignoring, for the moment, the more subjective and difficult to discern higher-order needs that humans have). So the caveman's utopia is not our own (as Nozick intones), and our utopia will not be identical with the utopias of future generations. Paradoxically, while the utopia of the worker often manifests itself as a land of idle and plenty, the utopia of Suits' utopians, who live in a land of idle plenitude, may well be a romantic return to the heroism of work (which they would presumably express via their playing of faux-instrumental games-by-default).

posit that utopian hypo-instrumentality, and the alien values and culture which must of necessity accompany such a state of being, constitute an insurmountable obstacle to the project of utopian relatability. If this is the case, then even if we are able to ameliorate the theoretical problem of post-instrumentalism by tweaking Suits' account to be less absolutist—and consequently address the problem of design, by allowing utopians minimal latitude for instrumental actions (such as facilitating their own amusement through minimally effortful computer-assisted game design)—the practical problem of cultural gap continues to be an issue, in addition to the lingering problem of reticence. On this account, Suitsian utopian games are not only contingently unknown, but also conceptually unknowable.

5.6 Summary

I end with the question I began with: What games will Suits' utopians play? As Suits did not tell us himself (outside of the very few marginally informative negative parameters outlined above), we are obliged to try to fill in the blanks. But as it seems likely that his utopians will constitute an alien species with a culture, values, and experiential content very different from our own, we cannot accomplish the task of describing their games. From a philosophical perspective, we must be as reticent as Suits was: philosophers, unlike novelists,

cannot reasonably be asked to speculate on what kinds of entertainments hypo-instrumental entities on the other side of a wide cultural gap might enjoy.

Relatedly, as a strictly post-instrumental condition appears to be necessarily conceptually inchoate, given the essentially needful entities that human beings are, there can be no 'endless summer' for which games will be urgently required "to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 189) There is, therefore, no concomitant duty to design utopian games (whether these are conceptualized as being intended for the amusement of future generations of human beings, or a successor species). Furthermore, we cannot pretend that games are a 'silver bullet' universal cultural solution to the private experience of boredom in Suits' projected future, any more than they are in our lived present.

Ultimately, in the absence of a suitably robust account of utopian games, we have good reason to reject Suits' assertion that game-playing is the ideal of human existence. The chief motivating force behind this rejection rests on the grounds that Suits helps himself to the premise that there exists some set of games-by-design in his utopia, such that the playing of (a sufficient number of) its members would sustain an existentially meaningful existence for his utopians in the event of a hypo-instrumental culture of material superabundance obtaining. But the set of utopian games is unknown and unknowable. Thus any implications of Suits' vision for the utilization of our leisure time in the present is vitiated by

the collapse of his normative ideal: his 'metaphysics of leisure' (Suits 2014, 194)
misses its mark.

Chapter 6: 'The Metaphysics of Leisure': Suits on Autotelic Gameplay

The games we play in our non-Utopian lives are intimations of things to come. For even now it is games which give us something to do when there is nothing to do. We thus call games 'pastimes' and regard them as trifling fillers of the interstices in our lives. But they are much more important than that. They are clues to the future. And their serious cultivation now is perhaps our only salvation. That, if you like, if the metaphysics of leisure time (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).

Underlying the central role of gameplay in Bernard Suits' utopian thesis is what he refers to as "the metaphysics of leisure time" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194)—his conviction that there is something *uniquely* good (possessing a value no other process can supply; otherwise, games would not be the exclusive preoccupation of his utopians) and *independently* good (not conducive of some further good; for games are essentially non-productive, and thus a fitting activity for a post-instrumental culture) about playing games. Suits' attempt to describe a unique and independent intraludic source of value in his utopia is supported by his subscription to the concept of autotelic (from the ancient Greek *telos* meaning 'end', 'goal', or 'completion', and *autos* meaning 'self') gameplay: the idea that the activity of gameplay is valuable for its own sake.

Suits illustrates autotelic activity—"activities which are ends in themselves" (Suits 1977, p. 117)—with the following example: "a *genuine* surmounter of obstacles does so in order to get to the other side, but a *high-*

jumper tries to get to the other side only so that he can be surmounting obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 101-102, emphases mine). According to Suits, we *play* only in order to *be playing*—the end is contained in the rule-governed activity of gameplay itself—and for players the “reason for accepting such rules is just because they want to act within the limitations the rules impose. They accept rules so that they can play a game, and they accept *these* rules so that they can play *this* game” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 33, emphases mine). Thus, the mere fact that someone *is playing* a game is *proof* of its unique and independent value for them; *the proof is in the playing*.

In this chapter, I will analyse the concept of ‘gameplay’ in Suits’ work in terms of its autotelic character, and defend it by way of John Rawls’ perfectionist ‘Aristotelian Principle’, which “characterizes human beings as importantly moved not only by the pressure of bodily needs, but also by the desire to do things enjoyed simply for their own sakes, at least when the urgent and pressing wants are satisfied” (Rawls 1971, p. 431). I will also discuss critics of Suits’ position such as Thomas Hurka, who holds that competing activities may have equal or greater autotelic value than gameplay (thus threatening the *unique* value of games), and Randolph Feezell, who raises the possibility that gameplay may be inherently *atelic*, or pointless (thus threatening the *independent* value of games). I conclude that Suits can defend a moderate, but not ultimate, valuation of autotelic gameplay.

6.1 Suits' Autotelic Gameplay through the Lens of Rawl's Aristotelian Principle

It would be difficult to argue that winning a large pot in a game of poker is not valuable, for the instrumental value of money is near-universally accepted. Nor would it be reasonable to suggest that recreational soccer is not valuable, for the instrumental payoffs of physical fitness and athletic discipline are abundantly clear. However, when instrumental sites of value are removed from the equation, identifying what unique and independent values the activity of gameplay might have is difficult. For example, what is the intrinsic value of playing a video game alone in a basement for a week straight? In other words what, if anything, is *uniquely* good (possessing a value no other process can supply) and *independently* good (not conducive of some further good) about playing games?

According to Suits, the players of games have a motivation for playing that is *internal* to their games of choice. This he calls the *lusory attitude*: “their *reason* for accepting such rules is just because they want to act within the limitations the rules impose. They accept rules so that they can play a game, and they accept these rules so that they can play this game” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 33). In this sense, gameplay is necessarily *autotelic*: we play games *essentially* in order to be playing games. That is not to say that a game cannot also *incidentally* have instrumental purposes attached to it, only that “such purposes are no part of the

definition of game playing” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 156). Suits’ definition of gameplay—briefly, that “playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43)—establishes that the lusory attitude is a necessary component of it, but also allows for the possibility of the melding of intrinsic and instrumental values in an activity, wherein people “are paid for doing what they would be doing anyway”, a condition Suits refers to elsewhere as the *Happy Hooker Principle* (Suits 1984b, pp. 16-17).

Suits thus claims to eschew *radical autotelism*, “the view that unless games are played solely as ends in themselves, they are not really games, that is, that amateurs alone are playing games” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 158). Instead, he suggests that “although professionals and amateurs admittedly have different attitudes towards the *games* they play, they have the same attitude towards the *rules* of those games” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 157). This move addresses an immediate objection to his account—the conceptual queerness produced by the possibility that professional game-players might not count as *playing* their games due to their motivations in participating not being *purely* autotelic.

However, it should be remembered that in “Tricky Triad”, Suits seemingly contradicts the central role the lusory attitude plays in his earlier account, by producing a typology with a non-empty category of non-played games, including professional athletic games (such as pro basketball and pro hockey) and professional nonathletic games (such as pro poker and pro bridge), which are

categorically “instrumental rather than autotelic events” (Suits 1988a, pp. 7-9). Although Suits himself is not consistent on this point, his earlier position fits more comfortably with the arguments presented in most of his other pieces, and with ordinary language—we do not, for instance, intuitively understand Wayne Gretzky to have been ‘working’ hockey, but rather playing it. Thus, I take Suits’ ultimate position on this matter to be reflected in the Happy Hooker Principle: that either the presence or absence of instrumental considerations in gameplay do not weigh for or against its status as an autotelic activity.

On this less objectionable reading of Suits, “all instances of play *are* instances of autotelic activity... autotelicity [is a] necessary but not sufficient for an adequate definition of play” (Suits 1977, p. 119). Primitive play is not intended to advance any other good instrumentally, and is therefore considered a good which has itself as its own end (Suits 1988a, p. 2). Similarly, sophisticated play, amateur games, and amateur performances also qualify as autotelic pursuits for him (Suits 1988a, pp. 7-9). More deeply, Suits identifies autotelic game-playing as the *telos* of the human being: it is the *ideal of existence* (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182), which arguably situates intralusory achievements as those possessing the highest possible value. Still, Suits’ descriptions of intralusory experience can read as worryingly flat, such as his depiction of an interminable ping-pong rally which he claims fits the description of an open game (because he can identify its prelusory goal):

A hits the ball to B so that B can hit the ball to A so that A can hit the ball to B, and so on... In a ping-pong rally there is a perfectly clear state of affairs that the players are striving to achieve. It is the state of affairs which consists in the ball's being in play (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 145-146).

From an external point of view to the activity of gameplay, this interminable ping-pong rally can look frivolous and pointless; but from an internal point of view it could be phenomenologically quite absorbing. And the internal frame is the relevant one for assessing an activity's autotelicity. We are reminded of John Rawls' thought-experimental grass counter:

Imagine someone whose only pleasure is to count blades of grass in various geometrically shaped areas such as park squares and well-trimmed lawns. He is otherwise intelligent and actually possesses unusual skills, since he manages to survive by solving difficult mathematical problems for a fee. The definition of the good forces us to admit that the good for this man is indeed counting blades of grass, or more accurately, his good is determined by a plan that gives an especially prominent place to this activity (Rawls 1971, p. 432).

What makes the grass counter's grass-counting activity rational is that it counts as an exercise of a human capacity towards a complex end, and that the grass counter is enjoying the activity. The behaviour conforms, in other words, to what Rawls call the 'Aristotelian Principle':

The Aristotelian Principle runs as follows: other things equal, human beings enjoy the exercise of their realized capacities (their innate or trained abilities), and this enjoyment increases the more the capacity is realized, or the greater its complexity. The intuitive idea here is that human beings take more pleasure in doing something as they become more proficient at it, and of two activities they do equally well, they prefer the one calling on a larger repertoire of more intricate and subtle discriminations. For example, chess is a more complicated and subtle game than checkers, and algebra is more intricate than elementary arithmetic. Thus the principle says that someone who can do both generally prefers playing chess to playing checkers, and that he would rather study algebra than arithmetic (Rawls 1971, p. 426).

The perfectionist framework provided by the Aristotelian Principle is perfectly tailored to explain and justify why Suits' utopians would play games in a post-instrumental, materially superabundant utopia, and how this autotelic gameplay expresses the ideal of human existence. Both Suits and Rawls would agree that by "accepting the Aristotelian Principle as a natural fact, it will generally be rational, in view of the other assumptions, to realize and train mature capacities" (Rawls 1971, p. 428). And so it is that Suitsian utopian games—those that require the most human capacities to be exercised at their highest thresholds to succeed at—would be the logical choice of activity for his utopians on this principle.

However, if we do *not* accept the Aristotelian Principle as a 'natural fact' (perhaps because we think it fails as an explanatory fiction to capture the phenomenon of laziness or other entropic forms of human behaviour), then it is far less clear why we should not entertain the possibility that gameplay *is* pointless, and thus lacking in unique and independent value. In the following section, I will attempt to provide alternate routes to Suits' position that gameplay is autotelically valuable. In the process, I will review alternate forms of telicity, provide an exegesis of Scott Kretchmar's concept of lusory 'gratuity', and offer my own concept of 'ludic alchemy' to help explain how the activity of gameplay can count as a value-conferring process in itself.

6.2 Other Forms of Telicity, Gratuity, and Ludic Alchemy

Like Suits, Aurel Kolnai believes that “playing chess is an autotelic activity: not primarily a means to something else but an aim in its own right in some people’s lives, actualized into a ‘here and now’ autonomous aim at times” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113). Unlike Suits, Kolnai contributes many other *telos*-derived terms to the discussion of aims in games, many of which illustrate subtle distinctions. Activities are said to have *heterotelic* (purely instrumental) value if they are “not enjoyed or appreciated in themselves”, such as “walking to one’s chess-club in wretched weather” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113). Meanwhile, a unit of action is considered to be descriptively *orthotelic* if “as a whole it is autotelic and its components are heterotelic” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113). Thus, an entire day dedicated to gameplay can be considered to be autotelically valuable from a holistic standpoint, including the heterotelically valuable actions which are performed in service of it: travelling to the venue of play, setting up the board, waiting for one’s opponent, and so forth. Kolnai introduces the term *syntelic* to describe activities which further multiple independent (autotelic and/or heterotelic) aims simultaneously; for instance, “a man may undertake a journey in order at the same time to see once more a place of which he is fond, to attend to some business and to see a personal friend of his there, and still at the same time to satisfy his craving for a change of air and to enjoy a night or two in a sleeping-berth” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113).

Finally, Kolnai refers to an internal, subordinate aim of an autotelic activity as *paratelic*. He writes: “I would also call the aim of ‘winning’ a paratelic aim, and the activity displayed *in* the game a paratelic endeavor or pursuit” (Kolnai 1966, p. 116). So on Kolnai’s account, while chess is played “normally for its own sake” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113) and “is not chosen... as a means to the end of being entertained somehow... but a specification of the entertainment desired” (Kolnai 1966, pp. 112-113), every act which serves to enable the desired chess gameplay shares in its autotelic value, and the value of this play in itself is not lessened by any other aims incidentally achieved in its pursuit, such as “the sharpening of our intelligence... [enjoying] companionship... [or] the aesthetic pleasure derived from handling a fine set of chessmen, *etc.*” (Kolnai 1966, p. 113). Additionally, in choosing to play—and thereby value—chess, one is also by extension subordinately choosing to value obedience to the rules, and to value achieving checkmate (or, failing in this, to value avoiding being checkmated by one’s opponent). Just as, for Ludwig Wittgenstein, “I bring about the act of willing to swim by jumping in the water” (Wittgenstein 2001 [1958], §613), we paratelically oblige ourselves to will to win by the act of agreeing to play chess. Thus Kolnai’s position, though it employs a host of novel and potentially useful supplementary terms, is perfectly in line with Suits’ concept of the lusory attitude, the Happy Hooker Principle, and the autotelic character of gameplay more generally.

A seeming challenge to Suits' schema comes from Randolph Feezell, who evokes the figure of Sisyphus from ancient Greek mythology "condemned by the gods to the eternal drudgery of ceaselessly and strenuously pushing a huge stone to the top of a hill, only to see it roll back down, from where he must retrieve it and continue his endless toil" (Feezell 1984, pp. 320-321). Sisyphus' rock-rolling "is an activity which has no *telos*; no goods come about, no external justification invests it with meaning" (Feezell 1984, p. 321). Let us call such purposeless activities, following Kolnai's naming conventions, *atelic*. Feezell compares Sisyphus' absurd and "pointless toil" to the atelic acts of the archetypal player of games, in that similarly "the activity of the player results in nothing tangible being produced" (Feezell 1984, p. 321). If the fundamentally non-productive nature of gameplay does indeed reduce it to being pointless, then a contradiction is generated for Suits: for gameplay cannot be *both* autotelic *and* atelic at one and the same time.

But while Sisyphus' activity appears to be a kind of inevitable torture that draws its sting from its being existentially meaningless, Feezell nevertheless invites us to:

Suppose that Sisyphus *wanted* to do what he is, in fact, doomed forever to do by necessity. We should think that his activity would then be like the bliss of heaven rather than the torment of hell, for his activities would be in perfect conformity with his desires, and each moment would be the experience of immediate gratification. What makes Sisyphus the image of an absurd life is the *gap* between his desires and the reality of his activity; he is burdened by *attitudes* absurdly distant from reality (Feezell 1984, p. 323).

Feezell's account implies that if Sisyphus could come to see his punishment as a game that he *wanted* to play, then he could find meaning in it. For if "one *desires* to engage in the activity; it is a good" (Feezell 1984, p. 322), much as in the case of Rawls' grass counter. Let us refer to this as *ludic alchemy*: the idea that mundane activities can be made into desirable games—either by an act of will, a change of conceptual frame, or some other means—and therefore manifest the autotelic goods unique to gameplay. This potential power of volition to alchemically valorize gameplay is captured in a phrase by Yasunari Kawabata's eponymous Master Shusai in *The Master of Go*: "If one chooses to look upon Go as valueless... then absolutely valueless it is; and if one chooses to look upon it as a thing of value, then a thing of absolute value it is" (Kawabata 1996 [1951], p. 107).

A slightly more modest version of the employment of volition to ludically transform reality is proposed by Scott Kretchmar, who writes that "lusory interests infuse routine events or potentially tedious work-like activities with additional meaning" (Kretchmar 2008, p. 150). Kretchmar offers us the do-it-yourself gamewrighting tools of *gratuitous valuation* ("when work, some routine event, or even a game itself is assigned extra worth or significance") and *gratuitous variation* ("the introduction of factors that increase uncertainty and unpredictability and, as a consequence, interest") (Kretchmar 2008, p. 151) to gamify our lives and thus "create a second world—a more challenging and

meaningful world—than the natural one” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 153).⁵⁸ If Kretchmar is right, and “*The Grasshopper* is fundamentally about boredom and how we might best cope with it” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 152), then he and Suits have much in common; for they both advocate using the artifice of game design to transform the world into a non-alienated state wherein meaningful activity is effortlessly generated via submitting to a framework of self-chosen or self-designed rulesets.

However, here the spectre of instrumentalism creeps back in again, for it appears that Feezell and Kretchmar are advocating the gamification of everyday life *in order to* defeat existential boredom or generate existential meaning. The committed instrumentalist—or *radical instrumentalist*, in Suits’ parlance (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 158)—would indeed regard the value of *any* activity, including gameplay, solely on the merits of the instrumental payoffs causally attached to it. Relatedly, Gwen Bradford intuits an *instrumental* motivation for gameplay in Suits’ utopia, as she claims that “we would do *anything* in order to stave off the incredible boredom that might set in while in Utopia... difficult activity is of necessary instrumental value in this respect—it’s necessary for our sanity”⁵⁹

⁵⁸ This terminology is built upon William Morgan’s earlier use of *gratuitous logic* to describe the game player’s adoption of the lusory attitude: to treat prelusory goals which are essentially valueless (from an extralusory standpoint) as if they had great value (from an intralusory standpoint) (Morgan 1994).

⁵⁹ However, in the passage that immediately follows this quotation, Bradford seemingly breaks with Suitsian canon, claiming that in his utopia “There are pills that we can take [to] give us whatever state we want, so feelings of boredom can be eliminated instantly” (Bradford 2015, pp.

(Bradford 2015, p. 96). Here, Bradford paraphrases one of Suits' main defences of why games are crucial in the preservation of his utopia: utopians don't need to do *anything in particular*, but they still need to do *something*, or go mad (Suits 1984b, pp. 8-9). That *something* turns out to be playing *games-by-definition*.⁶⁰

However, neither the logical necessity of fitting one's utopian actions to a stipulated definition of 'game', nor the practical necessity of avoiding mental imbalance, capture anything comparable to activities that we would normally ascribe autotelic value to. Indeed, as Andrew Holowchak objects, "game playing, undertaken by default [as in utopia], winds up *not* being autotelic... It is activity with a very definite [instrumental] end—the elimination of boredom" (Holowchak 2007, p. 93, emphasis and brackets mine). The autotelically valuable gameplay that Suits holds in highest regard therefore turns out to be surprisingly absent in his utopia, on Holowchak's reading. For playing good games is only valuable if one freely chooses to do so, and there is no such exercise of agency possible if games

96-97). This feature was not specifically mentioned in Suits' *The Grasshopper* or elsewhere in his corpus, but if Bradford's reading is considered a reasonable interpretation of his utopia, then games would no longer be the *sine qua non* of utopian life that Suits claims they are (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), because boredom—no longer considered inevitable—would no longer necessitate their play. Suits' utopia would then appear to be a mere *pharmatopia* (wherein drugs are instrumentally used to solve all socio-political problems) rather than a *ludotopia* (wherein intrinsically valued games incidentally serve that function).

⁶⁰ Games-by-definition include all utopian activities, as according to Suits' definition of the concept 'game', under conditions of post-instrumentality all human actions qualify as such due to being performed without instrumental intent. As a category, 'games-by-definition' thus encapsulates both 'games-by-default' (those activities which once had an instrumental purpose, but lack it in a materially superabundant utopia, and so are 'played' through as a kind of pseudo-instrumental mimesis) and 'games-by-design' (those activities which have formal constitutive rules, and are designed to produce autotelic value when played according to those rules).

are a both logical and psychological necessity in his entirely post-instrumental, ludically-totalized utopia.

To reiterate: if gameplay is *necessary* in Suits' utopia, but his definition of 'gameplay' requires that participation in gameplay be *voluntary*, then this would produce a seemingly fatal contradiction. For due to the restrictive stipulations of Suits' utopian vision, wherein all activities are games-by-definition, the activity of gameplay *cannot* be freely chosen in utopia, on the grounds that games are universalized therein: nothing remains in utopia that is a non-game. But a defence against this seeming contradiction may be possible if we hold, as Suits does, that the mere choice *between* games is sufficient for a meaningful exercise of the will in utopia. His thought on this matter is:

When work has been abolished people will be entirely free to pursue any life option available. The operative word, of course, is 'available'. When Henry Ford marketed his Model-T he announced that it could be had in any color as long as it was black. My Utopians can pursue any life option they wish as long as it is a game. I would be vulnerable to Nozick's critique of traditional utopias only if I were idiotically to insist that Utopia consisted exclusively in playing, for example, bridge (Suits 19--c, p. 81).

So even if one *must* play games in utopia, Suits would argue that the choice of *which* game to play is open, free, and meaningful. Thus, there is sufficient agency in utopia to rule out the choice of which games to play as being a *purely* involuntary and instrumental consideration. Suits' utopia thereby escapes the internal logical contradiction posed by Bradford and Holowchak's instrumentalist

reading of utopian games; utopian games are not *merely* destroyers of boredom, if we choose to play them on their own merits.

Indeed, *any* instrumentalist reading of gameplay practices would be an unfruitful analysis by Suits' lights, for it turns the proper focus on autotelic value on its head: the autotelic value of gameplay may *incidentally* defeat boredom or generate meaning, but that is not *essentially* why we play games.⁶¹

Instrumentalist readings also ignore the *inefficiency principle* in his definition of games, that to play a game *is just* to make a voluntary choice to select less efficient means to achieving a prelusory goal than are possible:

The queerness of radical instrumentalism becomes even more evident if we... consider conventional games from the viewpoint of that doctrine. Chess becomes essentially a procedure for acquiring chessmen, hockey essentially a procedure for getting rubber disks into nets, and foot racing essentially a procedure for breasting tapes. The queerness of the doctrine lies in the fact that if games are essentially procedures of this kind, then they are as unsuited to their purposes as they could possibly be. And an obvious corollary is that one of the worst ways to achieve some practical objective—building a house, closing a business deal, gaining sympathetic attention—would be to make that objective the prelusory goal of a game (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 159).

Foisting an instrumental reading into any purely autotelic activities thus results in absurdities. For Suits, the positive phenomenal experience, the fun or pleasure of playing and realizing one's capacities, *is* the autotelic value of—what is good about—gameplay. This is why, in his materially superabundant utopia

⁶¹ Indeed, playing games instrumentally to defeat boredom might be inherently self-defeating behaviour, in the same sense that consciously seeking pleasure or happiness is thought to make those ends less likely to obtain, according to Henry Sidgwick's 'Paradox of Hedonism': "that the impulse towards pleasure, if too predominant, defeats its own aim" (Sidgwick 1981 [1907], p. 48).

wherein all instrumental activity is eliminated, all that utopians would be left to do would be “those things whose only justification is that they justify everything else; or, as Aristotle puts it, those things for the sake of which we do other things, but which are not themselves done for the sake of anything else” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182). This ultimate and final value is found in gameplay, which for Suits is simultaneously both the “*ideal of existence*” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182) and a logical necessity if humans are going to be able to survive in utopia. For if “there is nothing to strive for precisely because everything has already been achieved... we must have obstacles which we can strive to overcome *just so that* we can possess the activity as a whole, namely, playing the game. Game playing makes it possible to retain enough effort in Utopia to make life worth living” (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 188-189). As has been noted previously, it bears reminding that Suits makes the full logical implication of this claim even more graphically clear: “Utopia must consist in game-playing because unless people play games in Utopia there will be nothing whatever to do and everyone will die—or go mad—of boredom” (Suits 1984b, p. 8). He therefore offers us a stark choice between (to borrow a dichotomy from Buckminster Fuller) his utopia of gameplay, or oblivion.

Thus, despite the fact that we can take the routes of bare autotelicity, the Aristotelian Principle, Kolnai’s syntelicity, Kretchmar’s gratuity, and Feezell’s more dramatic form of Sisyphean ludic alchemy to arrive at the conclusion that games have internal value, we might still argue against Suits’ position on the basis

that it ascribes *too much* value to games. Thomas Hurka does exactly this, and criticizes Suits' position on the basis of its extremism. In the next section, I will give an account of the Hurkean line of objection, which is generally pro-Suits, but advocates that his position be somewhat moderated.

6.3 Moderate Objections: Hurka, Suits, and the Goldilocks Principle

Hurka's reading of *The Grasshopper* is that Suits problematically "argues for the strong thesis that playing games is not just an intrinsic good but the supreme such good, since in the ideal conditions of utopia, where all instrumental goods are provided, it would be everyone's primary pursuit" (Hurka 2006, p. 220). Holowchak concurs that this 'strong thesis' is tendentious and difficult to defend, for "Suits argues that game playing is the ideal of human existence by ruling out other reasonable candidates through merely positing that, in a world where people could always do whatever they wanted to do, they would play games. Nowhere does he show the inadequacy of other suitable candidates... stipulation is not argument" (Holowchak 2007, p. 93).⁶² It must be conceded that Suits' dismissals of other potential candidates for autotelic activity

⁶² Holowchak's criticism of Suits here is not entirely fair, for Suits himself entertains doubts about the ultimate value of gameplay at the end of his 'anxiety dream', wherein utopians—upon realizing that they had spent their lives pursuing exclusively intraludic ends—"would believe themselves to be nothing at all, and one can imagine them, out of chagrin and mortification, simply vanishing on the spot, as though they had never been" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 196).

in his utopia, such as sex (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 187-188), art (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 185-186), and tourism (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 191) are rather brief and generally unconvincing.

Hurka instead favours the ‘weaker thesis’ that gameplay is simply *one* intrinsic good among others, as this claim is comparatively unobjectionable and does not jeopardize Suits’ overall position (Hurka 2006, p. 220). Hurka supports his weaker thesis by showing how the intrinsic good of achievement grounds the intrinsic good of difficulty, which in turn grounds the intrinsic good of gameplay:

Many contemporary philosophers include among their intrinsic goods achievement, by which they mean not just moral but also non-moral achievement, for example, in business or the arts. But what exactly is achievement? It clearly involves realizing a goal, but not every such realization counts as an achievement; for example, tying one’s shoelace does not unless one has some disability. And among achievements some are more valuable than others; thus, starting a new business and making it successful is a greater achievement than making a single sale. If we ask what explains these differences—between achievements and non-achievements, and between greater and lesser achievements—the answer is surely in large part their difficulty: how complex or physically challenging they are, or how much skill and ingenuity they require. It is when a goal is hard to bring about that doing so is an achievement. So reflection on our intuitive understanding of the value of achievement suggests a first reason for holding that difficult activities as such are good (Hurka 2006, p. 221).

Consequently, *not all* gameplay activities can instantiate the good of difficulty. Hurka identifies the class of games I have dubbed *trivial games*, which “lack all challenge” and have “too little difficulty” (Hurka 2006, p. 221). Trivial games are not difficult enough, and so playing them typically results in boredom. Thus, trivial games are lacking in overall autotelic value: for example, “rock, paper, scissors is not a challenging activity... not a very good game, and certainly

not one the playing of which has much intrinsic value” (Hurka 2006, p. 220). On the other end of the spectrum Hurka describes what I will here call *punishing games*, games “so difficult that no one can succeed at them”, which are likely to provoke feelings of anxiety (Hurka 2006, p. 221). Somewhere between trivial and punishing games lies the golden mean of *good games*, by which Hurka apparently means games that are well-designed (Hurka 2006, p. 221). Hurka’s position meshes perfectly with what I call Suits’ *Goldilocks Principle* of game design:

The gamewright must avoid two extremes. If he draws his lines too loosely the game will be dull because winning will be too easy. As looseness is increased to the point of utter laxity the game simply falls apart, since there are then no rules proscribing available means... On the other hand, rules are lines that can be drawn too tightly, so that the game becomes too difficult. And if a line is drawn very tightly indeed the game is squeezed out of existence (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 32).

The Goldilocks Principle is borne out in experimental psychology via the ‘optimal experience’ state of *flow*. Flow is identified by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi as total engagement and joyful immersion in an activity, and is said to occur when one’s skill level is well-matched to the difficulty of that activity: e.g., when one is competently playing a well-designed game (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, p. 6). Moreover, Csikszentmihalyi prescribes the following course of action to ensure that the desirable flow state persists: when one experiences *boredom*, the correct response is to *increase* the difficulty of one’s chosen activity so that untapped skills are brought back into play; and when one experiences *anxiety*, the difficulty of the activity ought to be *decreased* so that overtaxed skills regain

their effectiveness and agency is restored (Csikszentmihalyi 1991, pp. 74-75). Here the good being sought is, as in the previous accounts under our consideration, located in the activity of gameplay itself, and the value of the game *qua* artifact is largely neglected. This asymmetrical split in focus fits with Thi Nguyen's recent metadisciplinary commentary on academic work conducted in the philosophy of games: "For the philosophers of sports, the value of games is usually hashed out in terms of the desirability of the activity of playing the game, rather than in terms of the value of the game itself and the value of appreciating its inherent aesthetic qualities" (Nguyen 2017b, p. 12). Fittingly, this analysis of gameplay takes its approach from the philosophy of sport literature and does, indeed, largely ignore aesthetic considerations in favour of action theory, and puts more theoretical weight on the process of play, than on game as product.

To sum up: if we take Suits' and Hurka's accounts to be persuasive, then of the set of all games, only the well-designed ones can unlock the good of difficulty, which gives their players opportunities to achieve, at minimum, an expression of their human capacities, which can be understood as being an autotelically valuable activity. And if Suits is correct, then games need to be carefully crafted in order to elicit the expression of unique capacities which cannot—or ordinarily would not, at least—be expressed outside of gameplay (Suits 2007 [1973]). Taken together, these premises—'good gameplay is a uniquely and independently morally valuable activity' and 'good gameplay

causally depends on good game design’—imply that game design in line with the Goldilocks Principle is a morally valuable activity that deserves our further theoretical and practical attentions.

Take jumping, for instance. As a matter of empirical fact, people jump. Some people jump because they have to (for some instrumental reason, like escaping a bear), and others for the sheer exuberant (autotelic) joy of it. And some people, as it turns out, can jump better than some others. Now we can plausibly speculate that, at some point in history, some jumpers or spectators or both wanted to devise a test to determine whom was the best jumper in their group. And after some trial and error, though the march of time this test ends up becoming the relatively stable institution of the sport we now know as the high jump. The fact that high jump exists, and has a wide following, incentivizes more and better jumping in the subset of the population that has an interest in such things. Moreover, we might reasonably assume that humans have jumped higher than we ever previously had (or ever would have) as a species, due to the existence of high jump and the arduous application of its various strategies and technologies. High jump, in this rather limited sense, is the ultimate realization of a certain human excellence, and is a species-achievement. But even this is not the end of the story, for high jump might in turn inspire the invention of new sports, which would call for the further refinement of our jumping capacities, or their application to other (potentially more difficult and interesting) ends than clearing

bars. And so might a similar story be told for every other conceivable skill, as they are perfected in the games which best isolate and catalyse them.

Hurka's appeal for moderation in Suits' attribution of autotelic value to gameplay—that it be non-ultimate—leads us to a consideration of game design principles: that good games ought to conform to the Goldilocks Principle. This in turn reduces the scope of games that can generate autotelic valuable to those that are well-designed, which conceptually distinguishes a moderate Suitsian position from the extreme Suitsian position: the latter tolerates grass-counting as a worthwhile activity, while the former does not. We will now look at other possible constraints on games we might consider to be 'good'.

6.4 Well-Designed Games

Complicating the quest to discover the principles of game design which result in the production of games capable of sustaining autotelic gameplay is the near-unlimited potential inclusiveness of the activity of gamewrighting. In the words of Scott Kretchmar: “according to Suits, *any* artificial problem can be a game. *Anybody* who manipulates means and ends to manufacture a problem could be called a gamewright; and *anyone* who intentionally pursues a goal under artificial constraints may be participating in a game” (Kretchmar 2008, p. 144). However, while it may conceptually be the case that anyone *could* design a game,

it is rarely the case in practice that many of us *do*, and it is *likely* that many of us would botch it up if we tried. Of the set of games that *do* get designed, presumably very few of these are well-designed in the relevant sense. But what—other than conformity to the Goldilocks Principle—makes for a well-designed game?

Feezell writes that “Play activities are purposive in so far as they are oriented toward the ends internal to the playworld, and these activities lead toward a *consummation*... This consummatory aspect of play gives *meaning* to the activities that lead toward the end in view” (Feezell 1984, p. 322). Since existential meaningfulness is the essential criteria for autotelically valuable gameplay, it seems that well-designed games ought to be *consummatable* as well as difficult. Suits calls such games, with an “inherent goal whose achievement ends the game: crossing a finish line, mating a king, and so on”, *closed games* (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 143). By contrast, *open games* like children’s make-believe play have no such goals, and as such their players “are simply committed to striving indefinitely” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 146). Open games are poorly-designed, since their lack of definite purpose insufficiently structures player behaviour and experience, meaning that “children soon abandon such pastimes in favour of standard closed games” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 149).

Well-designed games are thus at minimum appropriately difficult closed games (therefore there can be no *infinite* rallies), with clear and terminable

prelusive goals. As Feezell notes, these goals orient and organize player behaviour and understanding:

Within a game there is a *telos* at the center of all the activities associated with playing it. Activities take on a clear meaning by virtue of the rules internal to the game. A world of transparent meaning comes about (Feezell 1984, p. 322).

Compared to the “muddled and, often, irreconcilable” disputes that frequently arise in the gameplay of open games due to their lack of structure (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 148), closed games by comparison are much more likely to generate positive psychological affect via their gameplay. In fact, if gameplay is indeed engaged in for its independent autotelic value, then games that generate negative psychological affect in their players are *prima facie* poor candidates to qualify as being well-designed. Thus, the interminable ping-pong rally has less of a chance to be a bearer of autotelic value for adult humans with a normal range of capacities, for “we prefer, other things equal, activities that depend upon a larger repertoire of realized capacities and that are more complex” (Rawls 1971, pp. 429-430).

On a similar line, I argued that well-designed games must provide opportunities for, and be responsive to, the exercise of player autonomy: for engagement is necessary in order to make gameplay a meaningful activity and preclude the existential threat of boredom. For this reason, well-designed games cannot be *soluble games* of pure skill with known dominant strategies, which

leave no opportunity for the exercise of meaningful player agency. Neither could they be games of pure chance where skill has no impact on the outcome, because player agency is nil there, as well. Thus, the design of good games would either need to be insoluble games of pure skill, or incorporate a balanced mixture of skill and chance—ideally, in this case the player would not know exactly to what degree the outcome of any given game was a matter of either skill or chance.

Moreover, if the psychological theory of positive situationism—that individual behaviour is significantly determined or affected by one's situation (while remaining agnostic about the extent of influence exerted by character)—is correct, then prospective game designers ought to be mindful of the values they express in their game designs, and the kinds of behaviours they reward and elicit from their players. And, if games are behaviour-affecting *situations* in the relevant sense, we might therefore have good reason to exclude *morally denigrating games*—games which tend to cause their players to behave in a vicious fashion after a sufficient duration of gameplay—from the set of well-designed games, even if these allow for a sufficient exercise of player agency, are phenomenologically engaging, aesthetically appealing, and have clear goals.

Indeed, we might have good moral reasons for attempting to use sound psychological principles to design *morally transcendent games*: games which tend to cause their players to behave in a more virtuous fashion after a sufficient duration of gameplay. Nguyen has recently argued that game designers have

some responsibility to design games which function as “social technology, which, when played with the appropriate players and the right attitude in the right context, can enable something of a moral miracle”: channelling the aggressive impulses of the individual into cooperative social behaviour (Nguyen 2017a, p. 136). While there is an obvious counterargument which could be made to Nguyen here, along the lines that intractably aggressive people are no more likely to obey the explicit rules of a game than they are the implicit rules of social intercourse, the concept of the morally transcendent game remains a tantalizing one, and is sure to motivate further discourse and analysis in the near future.

In adding consummability, insolubility, and non-degradingness to the Goldilocks Principle to our list of desiderata for good game design, we have rounded out the picture of what moderately autotelicly valuable gameplay might look like, in both Suits’ utopia and our world as well. We have not, however, broached the subject of the *institutions* of games, and their relation to gameplay more generally. This is an oversight we must address, because it would intuitively be the case that a good game might not be well played if its institution were corrupt; thus foreclosing the possibility of autotelic gameplay for that game.

6.5 Good Game, Well Played: Suits and MacIntyre on Game Institutions

Let us begin with Suits' definition of game institutions, in order to better understand their relationship to gameplay practice. He writes: "The institution of game *x* is a body of diverse meanings and practices that have in common the fact that all derive their being (that is, they are what they are) by being related, in one way or another, to game *x*" (Suits 2006, p. 4). Suits clarifies this picture somewhat in the following passage, wherein it is concretized that "there are a number of things that are lusory not simply by being *instances* of games, but by being related to games in a variety of other ways, for example, by trifling with them, by cheating at them, by defining them, by isolating elements of them for examination (e.g., their prelusory goals), by teaching them, by training for them, and, of course, by playing them" (Suits 2006, p. 5). So for every well-designed game that is actually played, there will be *an institution of* that game, and all instances of its gameplay and related activities will fall within the rubric of that institution.

By contrast, Alasdair MacIntyre parses the institution of a game as the sum of both its external and internal goods, considered in total. He writes of chess specifically (though any well-designed game would work equally well as an example), that there are "two kinds of good possibly to be gained by playing chess... goods externally and contingently attached to chess-playing and... goods internal to the practice of chess which cannot be had in any way but by playing

chess or some other game of that specific kind” (MacIntyre 2010 [1981], p. 188).

What MacIntyre calls ‘external’ goods, like money and fame, are purely instrumental and therefore fall outside the locus of interest of autotelic gameplay. His ‘internal’ goods, on the other hand, *prima facie* seem to capture precisely the kind of intralusory value we are attempting to analyse.

To realize the internal goods of a game, according to MacIntyre, is “to enter into a relationship not only with its contemporary practitioners, but also with those who have preceded us in the practice, particularly those whose achievements extended the reach of the practice to its present point” (MacIntyre 2010 [1981], p. 194). Therefore to play a good game, and to fully realize all the potential autotelic goods therein, is not only a matter of exploiting one’s capacities to the fullest, but also to appropriately situate oneself within the tradition of its institution: to understand one’s own achievements in an accurate relationship to those of one’s peers. This presumably constitutes a particular kind of *epistemic* achievement, which grounds one in a shared practice. And such an achievement seems equally possible in Suits’ utopia *and* the world of today.

MacIntyre contends that while a novice may be able to access a limited amount of intra-lusory goods, only a player who is fully immersed in and self-identified with the game’s practice will be able to realize the ultimate internal good—to play a truly great game, one that spills out over the ludic boundary and extends the reach of the practice. Indeed, this seems like the most difficult, and

the most valuable, kind of good that playing a game can provide. However, it appears at this very point that great gameplay arguably ceases to be purely autotelic, for it is here that MacIntyre makes specific reference to the effects of gameplay's practice on the extra-lusory world, annexing territory that formerly belonged to the realm of the non-lusory.

As Suits' utopian thought experiment is a tool for isolating and analysing a purely autotelic conception of intralusory value, there is no non-lusory realm for great gameplay to spill over into there. Does this imply that great gameplay in MacIntyre's sense, wherein "achievement is a good for the whole community who participate in the practice" (MacIntyre 2010 [1981], pp. 190-191), is impossible in Suits' utopia, since the practice cannot be conceptually extended? Not necessarily, for as previously noted (in Chapter 5) *not all utopians will be playing the same games*. Therefore great gameplay in the practice of one game could easily extend into, and influence the institutions of, other games. MacIntyre's practice-extension requirement can be satisfied even in Suits' utopia, which entails that great gameplay is possible there.

6.6 Summary

This chapter offers an account of Suits' concept of autotelic gameplay. Suits' thought-experimental utopian vision, wherein all possible instrumental

goods have already been acquired (or are immediately acquirable upon demand), is utilized to isolate and analyse the *independent* value of gameplay, the sole activity that remains logically possible therein. Games played in utopia must be chosen solely on the merits of their good game design—their ability to produce autotelic value for their players—for there are no other considerations to bear in mind.

However, as Hurka and others point out, Suits provides insufficient grounds for promoting gameplay to a position of ultimate value; other varieties of autotelic activity may have equal appeal, even under utopian conditions. I have identified this as a moderate take on Suits' position, though Suits himself confesses at the end of *The Grasshopper* that “game playing need not be the sole occupation of Utopia” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194) Thus, although gameplay cannot reasonably be argued to possess *unique* value, this does not threaten its *autotelicity*.

In the process of describing autotelic gameplay, and how it is plausibly generated via various forms of ludic alchemy—by perceiving or willing value into an activity—we broached Suits' and MacIntyre's accounts of game institutions and their role in ensuring that good games are actually well played. Though the proof of a game's autotelic value rests in the fact that it is chosen to be played, Suits would argue that the games that will naturally attract us the most are those that promise the best exercise of our natural human capacities, in line with Rawls'

Aristotelian Principle. In the next chapter, I will analyse the set of those games by advancing implicit perfectionist premises throughout Suits' oeuvre, culminating in what I call the *utopian game design thesis*: a Suitsian account of ideal game design practice, leading to a potentially more grounded expression of his *ideal of existence*.

Chapter 7: ‘Sports and Games Unthought of Today’: Suits on Capacities, Perfectionism, and the Utopian Game Design Thesis

The notable institutions of Utopia... foster sport and other games. But sports and games unthought of today; sports and games that will require for their exploitation—that is, for their mastery and enjoyment—as much energy as is expended today in serving the institutions of scarcity (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194).

An essential and yet often neglected motivation of Bernard Suits’ elevation of gameplay to the ideal of human existence is his account of *capacities* along perfectionist lines and the function of games in eliciting them. In his work Suits treats the expression of these capacities as implicitly good and the purest expression of the human *telos*. Although it is a possible interpretation to take Suits’ utopian vision to mean that gameplay in his future utopia must consist of the logically inevitable replaying of activities we conduct in the present for instrumental reasons (playing games-by-default), because gameplay for Suits is identical with the expression of sets of capacities specifically elicited by game rules, it is much more likely that he intends utopian gameplay to be an endless series of carefully crafted opportunities for the elicitation of special capacities (playing games-by-design) and thus embody his ideal of existence. This chapter therefore provides a new lens for understanding both Suits’ definitional work on gameplay and its connection to his utopian vision in the last chapter of *The Grasshopper: Games, Life, and Utopia*.

7.1 Suits and Hurka on Difficult Gameplay

As previously established, Bernard Suits is a central figure in the field of the philosophy of sports chiefly due to his oft-invoked definition of gameplay, the ‘portable’ version which we will remember reads: “playing a game is the voluntary attempt to overcome unnecessary obstacles” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 43). The ‘obstacle’ clause in the definition indicates that, for Suits, a player must encounter some minimal level of *difficulty* in playing for something to count as a game: consequently, overcoming this difficulty means passing the test posed by the game, by achieving its prelusory goal. What games test for are certain capacities, which ground the skills necessary for intralusory success.

To find value in gameplay is to see value in the difficulty of overcoming unnecessary obstacles, as Thomas Hurka does, claiming that “difficult activities are as such good” (Hurka 2006, p. 221), in no small part because difficulty is a precondition for the further widely accepted good of *achievement*. On Hurka’s account, good (well-designed) games “cannot be so difficult that no one can succeed at them, but also cannot lack all challenge: they must strike a balance between too much and too little difficulty” (Hurka 2006, p. 221). Bad (poorly-designed) games, on the other hand, are bad because they can fail in two ways to adequately test capacities: (1) ‘punishing’ games contain insurmountable

obstacles in their design, and therefore give us *difficulty without achievement*; and (2) ‘trivial’ games contain easily-overcome obstacles in their design, and therefore give us *achievement without difficulty*. Between these two extremes of punishing and trivial games, there is a Hurkean golden mean of *good* games, with an amount of difficulty suitable for the testing of human capacities, and thus producing achievement via gameplay.

Hurka is solely concerned with only this set of good games “because they realize what seems like an internal goal of the design of games” (Hurka 2006, p. 221), which is to say, they provide opportunities for testing—and in the case of achievements, realizing—players’ capacities through appropriately difficult gameplay. For Suits, similarly, capacities play a motivational role: “People play games so that they can realize in themselves capacities not realizable (or not readily so) in the pursuit of their ordinary activities” (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12). So good games test our capacities through the creation of unnecessary obstacles, and we seek out and play good games in order to have a venue for expressing and testing those capacities: taken together, these form a virtuous circle.

Suits makes a further claim that “games generate new skills by erecting artificial constraints just so those constraints can be overcome” (Suits 1988a, p. 4). What he presumably means here is that some capacities can *only* be realized and tested in games—because there is no natural circumstance which calls for their expression—such as the capacity which sources skill in achieving a

checkmate in chess. These capacities are necessarily ones we cannot know we have in advance of playing a given game; but to say that that they are ‘generated’ by the game rather than ‘revealed’ through gameplay may be slightly misleading. To understand why this is so, we must define what we mean by the term ‘capacity’.

7.2 Perfectionism and the Definition of ‘Capacity’

Both Suits and Hurka operate from a perfectionist moral framework, traceable back to the Aristotelian ideas of *telos* (human purpose) and *eudaimonia* (human flourishing) (Aristotle 1969 [c. 350 B.C.E.]). The concept of ‘capacity’ plays a central role in this schema, for it is by realizing our capacities that we bring our existences in line with our purpose as a species and arrive at a state of flourishing. As Gwen Bradford explains:

Knowledge, pleasure, achievement, loving relationships, and so on are valuable according to perfectionism because they are manifestations of special human features. Having these special features, and manifesting them, according to perfectionism, is having a good life. According to most perfectionist views, these features are certain *capacities* that are special to human beings. Developing these capacities to the most excellent degree possible is what perfectionism values (Bradford 2015, pp. 114-115).

To simplify this picture, we might imagine that each capacity of a human being could be represented by a series of switches, each with a binary ‘on’ and

‘off’ position.⁶³ Let us picture that all human capacities could be fully represented by 100 such switches for each individual person. The more switches that were in the ‘on’ position for any given person, the more fully realized that person would be, and the closer to the ideal of the good life that person could come. In terms of actualization, we could say it would be better to be a 30-switcher than a 10-switcher, and much better to be an 80-switcher than either of those. Again, we must assume in this example that—for Suits, at least—some switches would always remain in the ‘off’ position *unless* certain games are played, for he claims that “if no one had ever used his feet before the invention of foot racing, then foot racing would require the invention of running” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 51). So gameplay for him either has the power to (a) create new human capacities, or (b) reveal latent ones. Let us for the moment call (a) the *strong reading*, and (b) the *weak reading* of Suits on his relationship between capacities and gameplay. We will return to these divergent readings shortly after offering a definition of ‘capacity’. Suffice it to say for the moment that for Suits, the purpose of

⁶³ I am using a ‘switch’ metaphor to represent capacities here as a prose-friendly expedient, but in actuality capacities are more akin to *dials* on my account. Dials can be completely turned off (0%), completely turned on (100%), or stand at some percentile of ‘on-ness’ between these two extremes. A ‘dial’ metaphor helps us explain why it makes more sense to say that there is one general capacity for all language use, instead of claiming that proficiency in each language should count as distinct expressions of separate capacities. Saying that a person who is fluent in both English and French is operating at 46% on the dial of their potential linguistic capacity would seem to make more sense than to say that ‘English language capacity’ and ‘French language capacity’ constitute distinct capacity ‘switches’ and that both are in the ‘on’ position for the bilingual person. More plausibly, being bilingual would count as two specific instantiations of the more general linguistic capacity, each of which nudge the ‘dial’ of realization of that capacity upwards. Thanks to Paul Gaffney for suggesting the comparison with language in this context.

gameplay is to help us become more fully realized humans, by turning on certain types of capacities that cannot be elicited in any other fashion.

For the purposes of the argument at hand, I take capacities to be latent abilities to do, experience, or become something, which can be unlocked by fitting circumstances and thereby *realized*. More formally:

An agent A has a *capacity* to X if and only if under condition set α , A *can* X.

A *realizes* that capacity if A *does* X under α .

The relation is one between an agent and an act, where that act issues from the agent after being evoked by a catalysing circumstance of a fitting kind. Without a triggering circumstance, therefore, a capacity will never find expression: for example, in a world without fungi there cannot be any mycologists, although being a mycologist is clearly within the potential capacities of a human being. However, whereas we can witness acts (the realizations of capacities), we cannot witness capacities themselves: we must instead intuit (or, more often, retrodict) capacities from acts.

The preceding tentative account of capacities has been intentionally kept as metaphysically simple and transparent as possible, and it is my hope that this definition—wanting though it may be in some regards—will suffice to demonstrate what Suits means when he uses the term. Given what has been said so far, we can make a few further remarks about capacities. First, if we accept

that the realization of capacities is an essential feature of the good life, it becomes inconsistent to hold that metaphysical entities as evil, bad, or negative capacities can exist. If such capacities were possible, we ought to condemn, rather than praise, their realization. This is not to say, of course, that skills sources from capacities cannot be put to evil ends—for they very frequently are, as Bradford points out in her discussion of evil achievements (Bradford 2015, pp. 21-24). It is just that, along perfectionist lines, we would want to assert that capacities (in their unrealized form) are *a priori* good.

Secondly, because the realization of human capacities is the *telos* of our species, we can reasonably expect that the experience of doing so would be enjoyable, meaningful, and good in itself for individual members of our species. The most robust range of our possible capacities is given (and limited) by our species, though it is presumably reduced in scope by the influences of culture, social strata, and peer group, as well as our individual limitations. However, just as we were able to previously compare hypothetical individuals in terms of degrees of capacity realization, we could conceivably attempt a similar comparison between hypothetical cultures (or smaller groups). For instance, if the individuals that make up the population of culture C have 30% of their capacities realized on average at any given time, and the individuals who make up the population of culture D have only 10% of their capacities realized on average at any given time, then *ceteris paribus* we can non-controversially claim that

culture C is better than culture D in terms of its average rate of capacity realization across individuals.

Thirdly, we might be tempted by extension to posit an ideal of a fully realized human as someone who is actively expressing all of their potential capacities. For without committing to a fixed number, we can say that the number of contingently realizable capacities will differ between individual members of the same species, and that the more capacities that are being expressed on a regular basis, the more fully realized an individual would be. But total (100%) capacity actualization in an individual—a full realization of all capacities at all times—is a conceptually impossible ideal. This is because there exists incommensurability between certain capacities—speed and skill for instance, or power and cunning—which make the fully realized individual an incoherent ideal. This objection mirrors Isaiah Berlin’s argument regarding the incompatibility of certain goods in “The Pursuit of the Ideal” (Berlin 2013 [1990]).

Fourthly, we must acknowledge some epistemic issues in discussing capacities, for although we may attempt to enumerate the full range of possible human capacities, we cannot be confident that we have been utterly exhaustive. Nor, even in the case of capacities that are familiar to us and are generally acknowledged, can we glean precise percentiles of their realization in any given individual: the exact numbers, if such even exist, are hidden from us. Thus, since the realization of individual capacities is an epistemically inaccessible percentile,

we could not and would not know if and when we were to become optimally-realized agents.

Finally, we must make a distinction between at least two types of capacities: innate and learned. Regarding innate capacities, it seems that at least some very basic capacities are present from birth, such as the capacity to breathe. But can we fairly call a skill or ability that is always 'on' the expression of a capacity? For capacities must *prima facie* be at least potentially latent—or, at the very least, potentially latent. Something that is always 'on'—like the power to breathe oxygen—looks like it must count as something else; though perhaps if we are transported into an oxygen-free atmosphere (like deep space) without a breathing apparatus, it might make more intuitive sense to say in that case that we do indeed have a *capacity* to breathe oxygen-rich gases, but *circumstances* do not allow for the realization of that capacity. Thus, it appears that we can conclude that all living humans must have at least one or two of their metaphorical switches (representing innate capacities) in the 'on' position at any given time in order to exist. Further, an entity which is not actively expressing any innate capacity at all would not appear to be a human being on this account.

Regarding learned capacities, we might wonder: is learning itself a capacity—perhaps even a capacity by way of which we can acquire other capacities? This recalls our previous question: can a capacity be *created*, or are they always present and merely *revealed*? The quick and dirty answer would be

to say that a human being can only do what human beings *already* have the capacities to do (just as a tree cannot grow from an egg, nor a chicken from a nut). If new capacities could be *created* (as in the strong reading of Suits given above), this would require changing the ‘hardware’ of the human body and brain. This view of capacities might make sense from an intergenerational or transhumanist standpoint, with some finessing, as we will discuss below. However, standard accounts of perfectionism only advocate developing *human* capacities, not *superhuman* or *posthuman* ones. But if learning is simply a matter of *revealing* pre-existing capacities (as in the weak reading of Suits given above), then doing so requires nothing more extreme than changing the ‘software’ of our individual thoughts and habits, or perhaps our cultural outlook, which is well within the remit of perfectionist ideology.

7.3 Suits on Utopian Capacities and Utopian Gameplay

Despite the enduring central focus on Suits’ definition of games, his ‘utopian vision’ regarding the form and nature of a utopian existence consisting solely of gameplay has also recently risen to relative prominence and critical analysis (McLaughlin 2008, Vossen 2016, Yorke 2017). However, his concept of ‘capacities’ in relation to this subject has to date received insufficient attention. In this section I will endeavour to draw these threads together.

In Suits' utopian thought experiment, all human needs and wants are immediately met by telepathically-controlled supercomputers. Humanity has access to the logical equivalent of an infinite number of wish-granting magical lamps, each capable of granting infinite wishes (Suits 2014 [1978], pp. 182-183). So we must assume that if Suits' utopians want to modify their bodies, or even transfer their consciousnesses to other bodies, this is within the realm of utopian possibility for them—physics goes on holiday. Thus, radical changes to the human body itself may allow for the creation of new human capacities in utopia, in addition to those which could be facilitated by the introduction of novel sports equipment, which creates a hypothetical set of 'utopian sports' which would differ considerably from our contemporary sports: these are, arguably, Suits' famous "sports and games unthought of today" (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194). This line of interpretation clearly favors the strong reading of Suits on capacities.

There is an aspirational dimension to our choice of games for Suits, for "with the invention of games far removed from the pursuits of ordinary life, quite new capacities emerge, and hitherto unknown skills are developed" (Suits 2007 [1973], p. 12). Pedalling, in other words, can be thought of as a capacity that has little opportunity for meaningful expression prior to the invention of the pedal; and we can imagine, by extension, that with the invention of new pieces of sporting equipment, new parts of the body might come into play. Imagine, for instance, a new sport wherein a player's moves were controlled solely through

the fine-tuned flexing of their back muscles via an electronic interface: this would valorize a human capacity that has had few other relevant arenas of expression up to this point.

Thus, when Suits writes of “sports and games that will require for their exploitation—that is, for their mastery and enjoyment—as much energy as is expended today in serving the institutions of scarcity” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194) with regard to utopian games, what he is seemingly referring to is creating as-yet-undiscovered *new capacities* expressed in new forms of gameplay, and thus a more fully realized kind of being that would be playing them: a *utopian*. I argued in Chapter 5 that such utopians on a strong reading are unrelatable entities; that they are, at best, a successor species, a placeholder for the beings who will play games in Suits’ utopia, and that their values and mode of existence are necessarily obscured from our understanding, hidden behind an unbridgeable cultural gap between us and them.

I also acknowledged that this strong interpretation, while defensible in light of Suits’ more hyperbolic statements, is perhaps not the most charitable or productive way to understand his utopian vision. The weak reading of capacities for Suits must be closer to what he intended. His utopians must therefore either be ‘soft’ utopians, or serve as a regulative ideal (like the ideally virtuous agent)—i.e., they must *be us*, or *be relatable to us*—if his utopian thesis is to be rehabilitated to a state of plausibility.

Schematically, Suits can be read as implying that games, as voluntary efforts to overcome unnecessary obstacles, provide the required circumstances for the expression of pre-existing latent capacities. Conceptually distinct games typically elicit different capacities by design, and a utopia of gameplay would need to be replete with games specially designed to promote human flourishing through the expression of as many capacities as possible (especially due to the fact that the instrumental pressures and demands which previously provided the circumstances for their expression would be extinguished, via the advent of utopian material superabundance).

The 'duty to design' utopian games which Suits states we have (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194) is a task to be completed in the present, to begin the work of establishing a soft utopian culture, and can be parsed in such a way as to fit with the weak reading on capacities. Let us call his argument for this duty the *utopian game design thesis*, which can be briefly summarized as follows: (1) Certain capacities can *only* be expressed via gameplay; (2) the expression of those game-exclusive capacities is essential to the project of realizing our best selves; (3) these capacities are not generally being routinely expressed in the present (which may in part explain why many contemporary games have the low reputations they currently suffer from); but (4) these capacities could and should be being expressed via gameplay, because (5) we ought to try to become our best selves if such is possible; thus (6) we need to design a set of utopian games which

correctly identify and elicit the expression of these crucial game-exclusive capacities. This aspirational model of game design fully employs the cultural technology of games and gameplay in a new way—not as a pastime, but as a means for individual (and ultimately cultural) transformation—the Suitsian variety of *ludic alchemy*. The right kind of gameplay, for Suits, terraforms Earth into Utopia.

7.4 Objections to the Utopian Game Design Thesis

Against the weak reading of Suits on capacities and its relation to utopian gameplay, and specifically against the utopian game design thesis as laid out above, several axes of criticism can be levied. It could be claimed that we simply do not know enough about the scope and nature of human capacities to be able to design games adequate to the task of consistently uncovering or eliciting them. Alternately, it could be claimed that we do not know enough about the science or art of game design to be able to design games which are sufficiently compelling to realize the latent capacities that we do understand and non-controversially acknowledge we have. Perhaps most troublingly, there is an additional theoretical worry that if there is no essentially stable utopian body, then there can be no such thing as a utopian sport to be designed.

Counter to the first objection that we are insufficiently acquainted with human capacities to design games to elicit them, Suits argues that: “Rules are the crux of games because it is the rules of any particular game that generate the skills appropriate to that game” (Suits 1988a, p. 5). In other words, for Suits we needn’t worry about having an insufficient grasp of human capacities, because designers can more or less retrodict these through good game design. Jon Pike has recently written a nice *reductio ad absurdum* of this position, stating:

It is the skills that generate the rules, not the other way around. We have no rules to cover contests of unaided flying, and constructing some rules to cover such putative sports would not allow us to develop the skills to enact them. For unaided flying to be a sport, we do not need rules; we need wings (Pike 2018, p. 328).

While this criticism does apply to the sloppy wording of Suits’ formulation quoted above, I believe that the intention behind the text can still be rescued. Suits obviously did not believe that a game rulebook would produce the miracle of unaided flight in human beings: but he *did* believe that what human capacities do exist would be developed, when and where they were properly elicited, under the circumstances of gameplay. This seems to generally be the case in practice, at least where the game is good (well designed) in Hurka’s sense. Pike’s game, by comparison, is just bad, not in the sense that it is punishing (too difficult) or trivial

(too easy), but in the sense that it is *impossible* and as such cannot even be attempted.⁶⁴

Yet, even if contingently impossible games like Pike's sport of unaided flight might never get played, its ruleset might yet display the values of consistency and clarity, and sit on a shelf ready for use in the highly unlikely circumstance of a viable bird-human genetic hybrid being produced—and, in that odd hypothetical case, rules-appropriate skills would still have to be learned and developed by the game's participants. Indeed, the only class of games for which skills could *never* under any circumstances be developed in line with its ruleset would be conceptually impossible games—for instance, those that require their players to draw squared circles. In any other case, it seems like game designers could potentially work something out with regard to fitting their rulesets to those capacities which they have some reason to think exist (or at least *could* exist in a nearby possible world).

Game design is nevertheless somewhat philosophically undertheorized, which could leave Suits open to the second objection: that we do not understand the principles of game design well enough to reliably elicit human capacities with it. While it is true that philosophers have not yet produced a definitive answer to the question of exactly *what role* game design should have in producing human

⁶⁴ Ignoring, for the moment, the speculative evolutionary perspective from which we might argue that 'arms are latent wings'.

well-being, it will be evident from our preceding discussion that at least Suits and Hurka, among others, coordinate on the position that it *does* have a role to play.⁶⁵ But even if they are correct, the question remains as to whether we ought to regard game design as a hard science that we could hypothetically completely understand and eventually master, or as a soft art, whose forms and norms shift according to time, place, and custom.

From a Suitsian perspective, it seems we must treat game design like a science, for its task in his schema is to provide a universal source of entertainment for all utopians, protecting them from boredom-induced madness and thus vouchsafing the stability of his utopia. If anything, game design in this context looks like a modest expression of positive situationism, the psychological theory that certain environmental features can have an overriding influence on the moral actions of the agents inhabiting them. In line with Suits' utopian game design thesis, it appears that playing good games could conceivably *condition* us to be good people.

Thus, on Suits' capacity model of gameplay, a science of game design could help pre-utopians like ourselves become better people by providing greater and better-calibrated obstacles for them to overcome and thus unlocking greater

⁶⁵ Thi Nguyen believes that games have a morally transformative function in turning competitive urges into competitive behavior, and that good game design plays a central role in enabling this transformation (Nguyen 2017a).

and greater capacities. For if the definition of gameplay is identical with the expression of human capacities, then what is the utopia of continuous, endless gameplay except an unending expression of the range of all latent human capacities? The *utopian game design thesis* thus stated fits with Suits' overall schema, but yields the odd result that designers of well-designed games are already *de facto* involved in a project of moral perfectionism, whether or not they are aware of it (and most, presumably, are not).

Arguably, the principles of game design are sufficiently developed to tell us which kinds of games are adequate for testing human capacities and which are not, and to what extent. Tic-tac-toe, for instance, requires only the understanding of one simple strategy in order to fully master it, so we can safely conclude that few important human capabilities are tested or unlocked in playing it. Slot machines are even worse, in that even less cognition and dexterity are required in their operation, and so there is even less room for the exercise of player agency. More complex games, by comparison, produce more intense and difficult challenges for their players, thus enabling the realization of their players' capacities, and so correspondingly producing more high-value achievements via their gameplay. The more we develop our account of the theory and practice of how game design identifies, isolates, and elicits various capacities, the safer Suits looks to be from the criticism that our understanding of games is too primitive to

reliably elicit capacities through erecting obstacles of properly-calibrated difficulty.

Difficulty is, however, agent-relative: what is hard (or even impossible) for me to achieve might be easy for you to achieve, and vice versa; so the game that you find trivial I may find to be punishing, and the game you find punishing I may find to be trivial. In this way, intralusory achievements must be understood as subjective. This is why there must be a plurality of games in Suits' utopia: there can be no 'one game to amuse them all'. His utopians, like us, would seek the kind of games which would provide the best fit in terms of challenge (maxing out their capacities), based on age, ability, and bodily build (assuming, for the moment, that these parameters are fixed for the purpose of playing utopian games).

However, following the lines of Suits' utopian thought experiment we can plainly see that having omniscient, omnipotent players is a live possibility, and that the realization of this state would eliminate all potential sources of difficulty. For if utopian players of any sport wished themselves into wildly different bodily configurations from each other prior to a match (via their wish-granting supercomputers), then nothing could stop them from doing so. From this fact we can infer that there is no essential utopian body, and thus there can be no

utopian sports.⁶⁶ This is because the capacity of landing a three-pointer in a game of basketball relies on having human arms within a certain range of lengths, the court being bounded by a certain set of measurements based on the average rate of locomotion for an average-sized human, and the net being set far enough off the ground that making the shot is not trivial (say, not lower than three feet above the average human's height), but not so far off the ground as to make it punishing for the majority of human beings (say, not higher than a two-story building). Thus the goodness of basketball's game design directly relies on the relative phenotypical stability, and so the predictable capacities, of our species. In order to protect the logical possibility of good utopian sports existing, Suits would either be forced to add the caveat that the telepathically-controlled supercomputers of his techno-Cockayne could not be used to transmogrify the human subject, or—more plausibly—require that utopian players coordinate on game rules circumscribing their unrestricted intraludary use, and have them unfailingly observe these restrictions.

7.5 Summary

Suits' utopian vision is attained under conditions wherein instrumental activity is made redundant by technological advances, and everything which can

⁶⁶ This line of argument comes from a long-running discussion with Jon Pike.

be known in theory is in fact known in practice. Humans would then be free to pursue an unfettered life of intrinsically valuable game-playing, which in Suits' view best fits the human *telos*, and thus opens up the most promising available avenue to his version of *eudaimonia*. This is the 'ideal of existence'. It is also, from the pre-utopian human perspective, an unrelatable state of being.

In order to rehabilitate the utopian thesis, Suits must subscribe to something like the utopian game design thesis, which is the logical extension of his capacity model of games—by designing better games, which allow for the expression of the greatest range of human capacities and the widest range of human experience, we allow for the possibility of making better people through gameplay: both in the circumstances of utopia, and in the here and now. The best games are utopian games, and playing these utopian games shapes the best people, who are either utopians or those able to reasonably emulate them. This regulative ideal is a more reasonable projection of what Suits called the “*ideal of existence*” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 182) when his capacity model is taken into account; and the perfectionist backdrop helps make better sense of his urging contemporary game designers “to begin the immense work of devising these wonderful [utopian] games now” (Suits 2014 [1978], p. 194), for the realization of our human capacities in the present is a moral imperative which demands our philosophical attention much more urgently than an empty and disconnected abstraction.

Conclusion: Suits' Utopia of Gameplay, Revised and Refined

Bernard Suits' *utopian thesis* is the philosophical position that the '*ideal of existence*' for humankind is a utopia of gameplay. Suits supports his utopian thesis by means of his thought-experimental *utopian vision*, better described as a *techno-Cockaygne*, wherein all instrumental needs are immediately satisfied or eliminated via technological means. This leaves human beings free to realize their species-purpose, realizing their capacities and living flourishing lives, through the playing of utopian games.

In this dissertation, I have shown how the parameters of Suits' utopian vision would challenge many of our contemporary moral intuitions, and argued that while its realization would narrow the scope for virtuous action, it would not altogether extinguish it. I have also argued that Suits' claims that his utopians would suffer from a crisis of leisure and an existential boredom so great that they would commit suicide is an overstatement, based on a ambiguity which can be easily resolved by applying my distinctions between two types of utopians (at times U_1 and U_2), and two different types of utopian games—games-by-default and games-by-design—which have very different functions. Games-by-default would act as a kind of occupational methadone for U_1 utopians, to help them transition into a post-instrumental utopian lifestyle; while games-by-design would constitute meaning-generative life projects for U_2 utopians.

However, due to the unbridgeable cultural gap between Suits' utopians and ourselves, we cannot determine the content of utopian games-by-design, but only identify what they cannot be. If we cannot accurately imagine what it is like to be a post-instrumental utopian, then we cannot have a duty to design utopian games in the present, as Suits claims we do. In other words, the plausibility of his utopian thesis rests on the speculative existence of a set of 'really magnificent games' which, if not describable (and he does not do so), make his utopian thesis no more rationally compelling than any other article of faith.

In an attempt to rehabilitate Suits' utopian thesis in light of these objections, I analysed various principles of good game design and identified a set of potential *methods* for the design of utopian games, without committing to a specific prototype. This project culminated in my articulation of the *utopian game design thesis*, the idea that games should be designed with the goal of helping their players to realize better, and more of, their human capacities, which would have the result of producing a renaissance of good, meaningful gameplay in the present. My proposal has the benefit of remaining consistent with Suits' underlying perfectionist theoretical orientation, and returns his utopian thesis to its appropriate function as a regulative ideal, rather than merely viewing it as a 'logical inevitability'. I conclude that Suits' utopian vision, thus refined and revised, is a valuable end to contemplate and pursue, even if it cannot constitute the kind of ultimate value that Suits intended it to.

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